PRIT BUTTAR

Author of
Germany Ascendant & Collision of Empires

RUSSIA'S LAST GASP

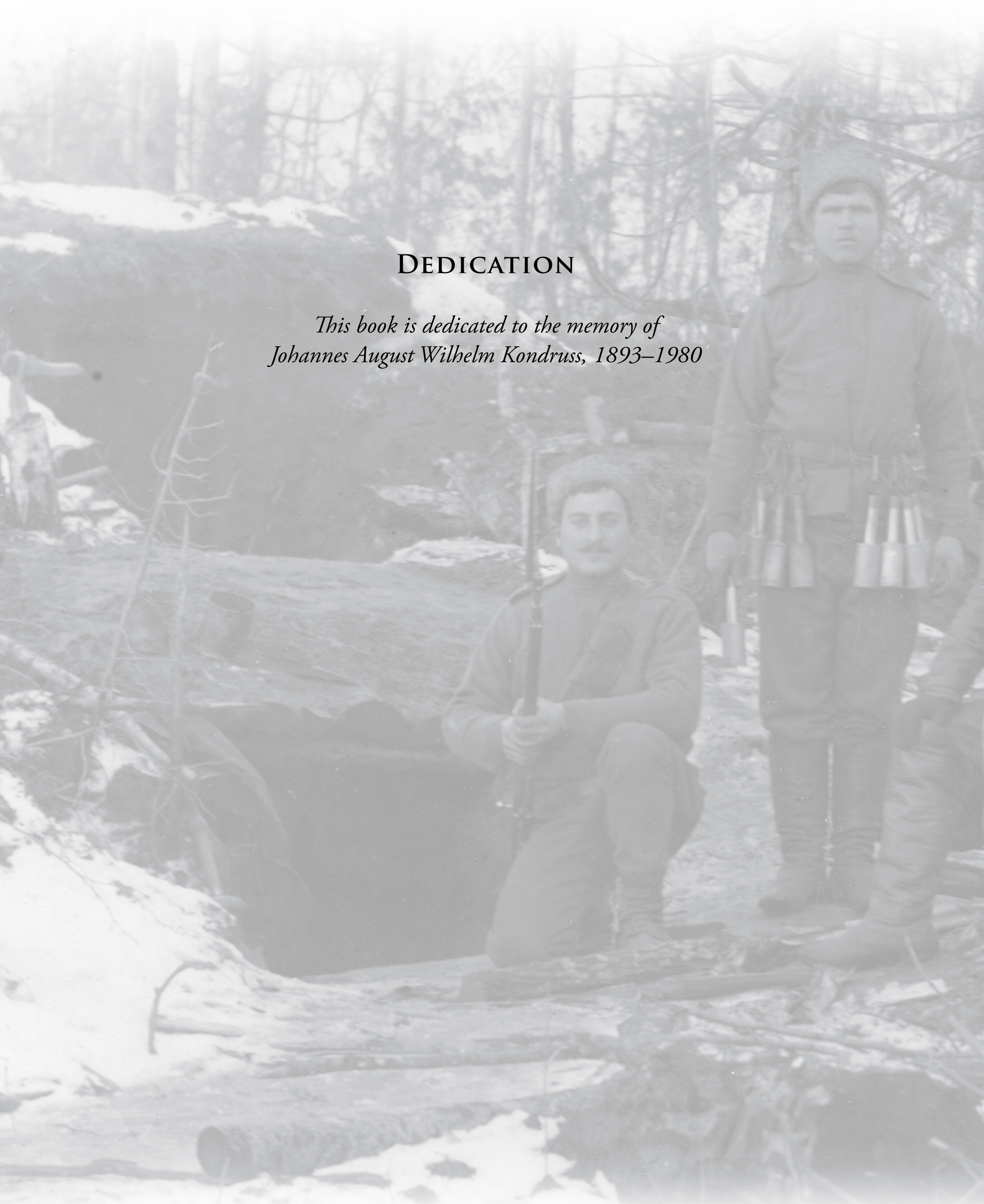
THE EASTERN FRONT 1916–17

RUSSIA'S LAST GASP

OSPREY
PUBLISHING

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of
Johannes August Wilhelm Kondruss, 1893–1980



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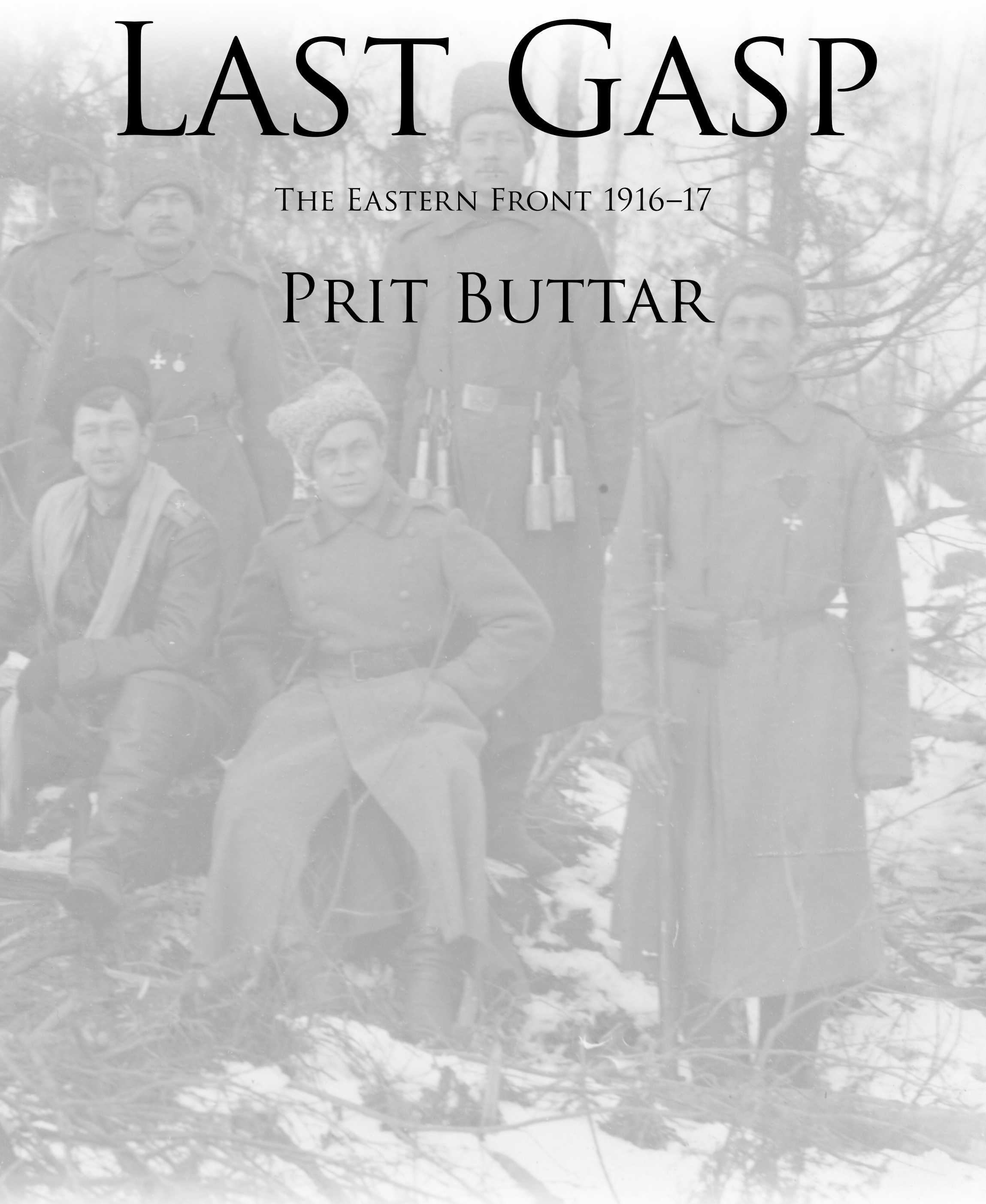

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Front cover: In 1915, the Russian Army introduced specialists in trench warfare. Known as grenadier platoons because of their reliance on grenades, they were organised and trained to carry out small-scale, specialist assaults, as well as spearheading large-scale operations. This group is typical of such a platoon. (From the fonds of the RGAKFD in Krasnogorsk via Stavka)

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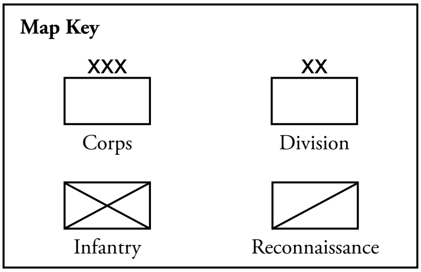

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

AUSTRIA-HUNGARY

Arz von Straussenberg, Arthur – commander VI Corps, later commander of reformed First Army in Transylvania, later chief of general staff
Benigni, Siegmund von – commander eponymous corps, later commander VIII Corps
Berndt, Otto – chief of staff Fourth Army
Böhm-Ermolli, Eduard von – commander Second Army
Bolfras, Arthur von – chief of the military chancellery
Burián, Stephan – foreign minister
Conrad von Hötzendorf, Franz – chief of general staff, replaced by Arz
Csanády von Békés, Friedrich – commander X Corps
Czernin von und zu Chudenitz, Ottokar – ambassador in Bucharest
Dankl, Viktor – commander Eleventh Army
Eugen (Archduke) – commander Italian front
Fath, Heinrich – commander eponymous corps
Frederick (Archduke) – nominal commander *k.u.k.* Army
Habermann, Ferdinand von – commander XI Corps
Hadfy von Livno, Emmerich – commander eponymous corps
Hauer, Leopold Freiherr von – commander eponymous corps
Henriquez, Johann Ritter von – commander XII Corps
Hohenlohe, Gottfried – ambassador in Berlin
Joseph Ferdinand (Archduke) – commander Fourth Army, succeeded by Tersztyánsky
Kaiser, Julius – commander II Corps
Karl (Archduke) – heir to the Habsburg throne, later Karl I of Austria and Karl IV of Hungary
Korda, Ignaz Edler von – commander XI Corps, succeeded by Habermann

Kosak, Ferdinand – commander 27th Infantry Division, later commander eponymous battlegroup
Kövessháza, Hermann von Kövesz von – commander Third Army
Krauss, Alfred – chief of staff Italian front
Kralowetz von Hohenrecht, Gottlieb – chief of staff X Corps
Martiny, Hugo – commander X Corps, replaced by Csanády
Obauer, Rudolf – commander 11th Infantry Division
Ostermuth, Johann – commander eponymous cavalry corps
Pflanzer-Baltin, Karl von – commander Seventh Army
Podhoránszky, Eugen von – commander 35th Infantry Division
Puhallo, Paul – commander First Army
Scheuchenstuel, Viktor – commander VIII Corps, succeeded by Benigni
Smekal, Gustav – commander eponymous division
Szurmay, Sándor – commander eponymous corps, later renamed XXIV Corps
Tersztyánsky, Karl von – commander Fourth Army
Tisza, István – prime minister of Hungary
Zeynek, Theodor von – chief of staff Seventh Army

BULGARIA

Kiselov, Panteley – commander 4th Infantry Division
Toshev, Stefan – commander Third Army

GERMANY

Batocki-Friebe, Adolf Tortilowicz von – president of East Prussia 1914–1916 and 1918–1919, president of the War Food Office 1916–1917
Beckmann, Max – commander 108th Infantry Division
Below, Otto von – commander Eighth Army
Bernhardi, Friedrich von – commander eponymous corps
Beseler, Hans Hartwig von – governor of *Generalgouvernement* in Warsaw
Bethmann-Hollweg, Theobald von – chancellor
Bothmer, Felix von – commander South Army
Bruchmüller, Georg – German artillery officer, nicknamed 'Durchbruchmüller' ('Durchbruch' = 'breakthrough')
Bussche, Hilmar von dem – ambassador in Bucharest

Conta, Richard von – commander 1st Infantry Division, later commander *Karpatenkorps*
Cramon, August von – military envoy at *AOK*
Eichhorn, Hermann von – commander Tenth Army
Fabeck, Maximilian von – commander Twelfth Army
Falkenhayn, Erich von – chief of the general staff, later commander Ninth Army
Falkenhayn, Eugen von – commander eponymous corps
Hammerstein-Equord, Kurt von – liaison officer with Bulgarian Army, later commander eponymous force
Hell, Emil – staff officer in *Ober Ost*, later chief of staff *Korps Litzmann*
Hesse, Hans – chief of staff Ninth Army
Hindenburg, Paul von – commander *Ober Ost*, later chief of the general staff
Hoffmann, Max – staff officer at *Ober Ost*, later chief of staff
Hutier, Oskar von – commander XXI Corps
Jagow, Gottlieb von – foreign minister
Kneussl, Paul Ritter von – commander 11th Bavarian Infantry Division
Kosch, Robert – commander eponymous corps
Krafft von Dellmensingen, Konrad – commander *Alpenkorps*
Kühne, Victor – commander LIV Corps
Leonhardi, Theodor von – commander, eponymous corps
Linsingen, Alexander von – commander Bug Army and eponymous army group
Litzmann, Karl – commander XL Corps, later commander eponymous corps
Ludendorff, Erich – chief of staff at *Ober Ost*, later quartermaster-general
Lüttwitz, Walther von – commander X Corps
Mackensen, August von – commander Central Powers forces on the Salonika front, later commander Central Powers forces in Dobruja
Marwitz, Georg von der – commander eponymous corps
Morgen, Curt von – commander I Reserve Corps
Oppeln-Bronikowski, Hermann von – commander 48th Reserve Infantry Division
Riezler, Kurt – foreign office official, author of the September Programme
Schmettow, Eberhard Graf von – commander eponymous cavalry corps
Seeckt, Hans von – chief of staff to Mackensen, later chief of staff *k.u.k.* Seventh Army, later chief of staff Army Group Crown Prince Karl
Staabs, Hermann von – commander XXXIX Reserve Corps
Sunkel, Edwin – commander 187th Infantry Division
Tappen, Gerhard – chief of staff to Mackensen in Romania

ROMANIA

Antonescu, Ion – operations officer North Army; head of state in Second World War
Aslan, Mihai – commander Third Army
Averescu, Alexandru – commander Second Army, later commander of Third Army and other forces in southern Romania, later reappointed to command Second Army
Brătianu, Ion – prime minister
Christescu, Constantin – deputy chief of general staff before outbreak of hostilities
Crăiniceanu, Grigore – commander Second Army, replaced Averescu
Culcer, Ion – commander First Army, replaced by Dragalina
Dragalina, Ioan – commander 1st Infantry Division, later commander First Army
Grigorescu, Eremia – commander 15th Infantry Division
Iliescu, Dumitru – secretary-general of war ministry, chief of general staff after outbreak of hostilities
Negrescu, Nicolae – commander Danube Flotilla
Niculescu-Rizea, Constantin – commander Danube river defences
Popovici, Ioan – commander Olt Corps
Porumbaru, Emanuel – foreign minister
Prezan, Constantin – commander North Army, later commander Romanian forces in Battle of Bucharest
Ştirbey, Barbu – politician and confidant/lover of Queen Marie
Teodorescu, Constantin – commander of Tutrakan garrison
Zottu, Vasile – chief of general staff before outbreak of hostilities

RUSSIA

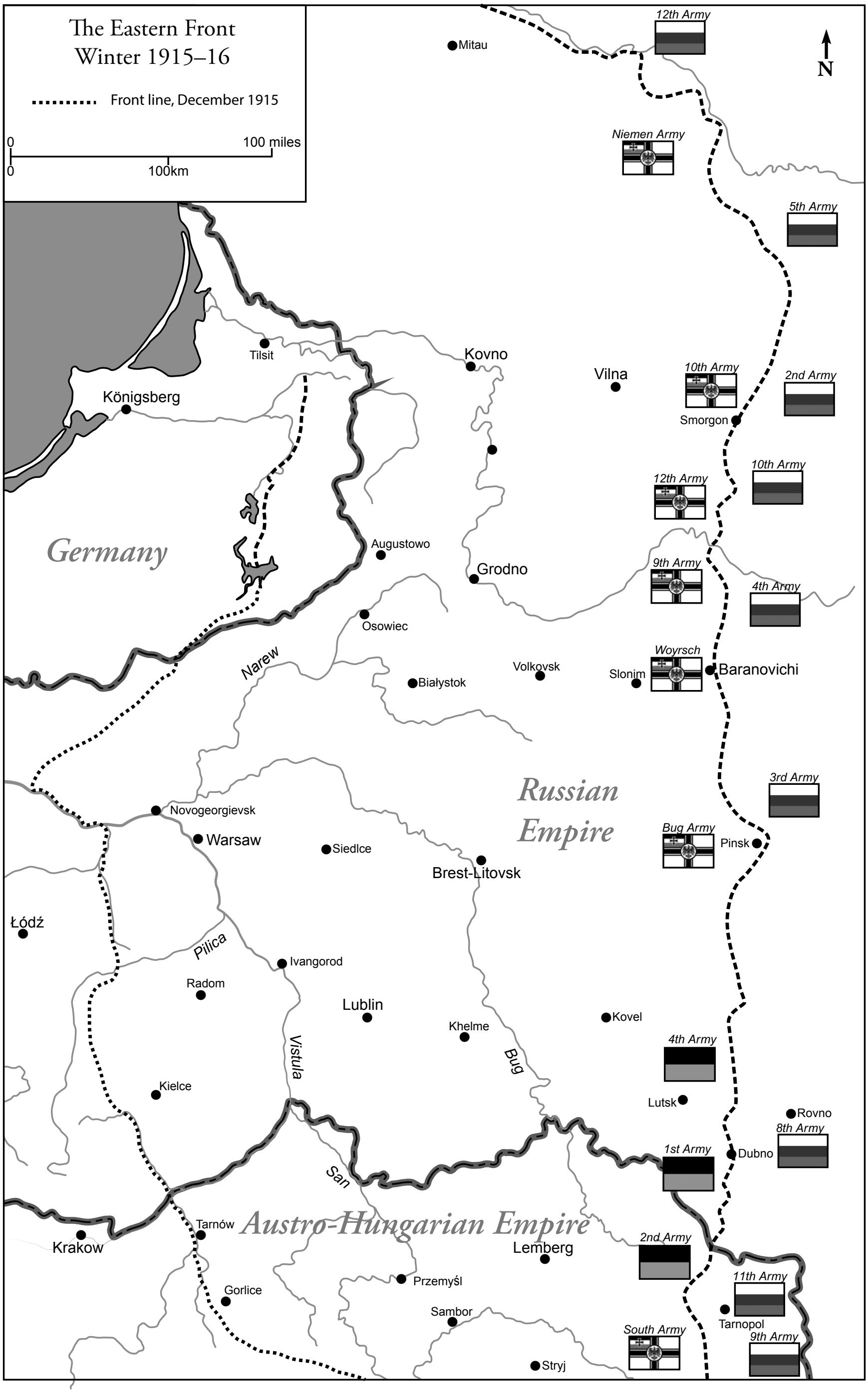
Alexeyev, Mikhail Vasiliyevich – chief of general staff
Baluev, Petr Semenovich – commander V Corps
Barantsov, Mikhail Alexandrovich – commander XI Corps
Bezobrazov, Vladimir Mikhailovich – commander Guards Army/Special Army, succeeded by Gurko
Brusilov, Alexei Alexeyevich – commander Eighth Army, later commander Southwest Front
Dimitri Pavlovich (Grand Duke) – son of and aide-de-camp to Grand Duke Pavel Alexandrovich

Diterikhs, Mikhail Konstantinovich – quartermaster Southwest Front
Dragomirov, Abram Mikhailovich – commander IX Corps
Evert, Alexei Ermolayevich – commander West Front
Fedotov, Ivan Ivanovich – commander XXXII Corps
Gillenschmidt, Jakov Fedorovich – commander IV Cavalry Corps
Gorbatovsky, Vladimir Nikolayevich – commander Twelfth Army
Goremykin, Ivan Logginovich – prime minister, succeeded by Stürmer
Gurko, Vasily Iosifovich – commander Fifth Army, then commander Special Army, later acting chief of general staff
Ignatiev, Alexei Nikolayevich – chief of staff Guards/Special Army
Ivanov, Nikolai Iudevich – commander of Southwest Front, succeeded by Brusilov
Kaledin, Alexei Maximovich – commander XII Corps, later commander Eighth Army
Khvostov, Alexei Nikolayevich – minister of the interior, replaced by Stürmer
Klembovsky, Vladislav Napoleonovich – chief of staff Southwest Front
Kornilov, Lavr Georgeyevich – commander XXV Corps
Kuropatkin, Alexei Nikolayevich – commander Northern Front, replaced by Ruzsky
Lechitsky, Platon Alexeyevich – commander Ninth Army
Lesh, Leonid Vilgelmovich – commander Third Army
Litvinov, Alexander Ivanovich – commander First Army
Pavel Alexandrovich (Grand Duke) – commander I Guards Corps
Plehve, Pavel Adamovich – commander Northern Front, succeeded by Kuropatkin
Pleshkov, Mikhail Mikhailovich – commander I Siberian Corps
Polivanov, Alexei Andreyevich – war minister, replaced by Shuvayev
Promtov, Mikhail Nikolayevich – commander III Cavalry Corps
Rauch, Georg Ottonovich – commander II Guards Corps
Ragosa, Alexander Franzevich – commander Fourth Army, temporarily commander Second Army
Rodzianko, Mikhail Vladimirovich – state councillor, member of the Russian 'Progressive Bloc'
Ruzsky, Nikolai Vladimirovich – commander Northern Front
Sakharov, Vladimir Victorovich – commander Eleventh Army, later commander of Army of the Danube
Savich, Sergei Sergeyevich – commander XVI Corps
Scheidemann, Sergei Mikhailovich – commander I Turkmenistan Corps

Sergei Mikhailovich (Grand Duke) – inspector-general of artillery
Shcherbachev, Dmitri Gregorovich – commander Seventh Army
Shuvayev, Dmitri Savelyevich – war minister, replaced Polivanov
Sirelius, Leonid Ottovich – commander IV Siberian Corps
Sluysarenko, Vladimir Alexeyevich – commander Fifth Army, replaced Gurko
Smirnov, Vladimir Vasilyevich – commander Second Army
Stürmer, Boris Vladimirovich – prime minister, later also minister of the interior
Winogradsky, Alexander Nikolayevich – commander 14th Artillery Brigade, later military advisor in Romania
Zayontchovsky, Andrei Medardovich – commander XXX Corps, later commander of Russian forces in Romania
Zhilinsky, Yakov Gregoreyevich – military attaché in France

MISCELLANEOUS

Berthelot, Henri (France) – military advisor in Romania
Knox, Alfred (Britain) – military attaché in Russia
Paléologue, Maurice (France) – ambassador in Petrograd
Piłsudski, Józef (Poland) – commander Polish Legion, later head of state of Poland
Sarrail, Maurice (France) – commander of Anglo-French forces in Salonika



The Eastern Front
Winter 1915–16

Front line, December 1915
0
100 miles
0
100km
N
Germany
Russian Empire
Austro-Hungarian Empire
12th Army
Niemen Army
5th Army
10th Army
2nd Army
12th Army
10th Army
9th Army
4th Army
Woyrsch
3rd Army
Bug Army
4th Army
8th Army
1st Army
2nd Army
11th Army
South Army
9th Army
Mitau
Tilsit
Königsberg
Kovno
Vilna
Smorgon
Augustowo
Grodno
Osowiec
Białystok
Volkovsk
Slonim
Baranovichi
Narew
Novogeorgievsk
Warsaw
Siedlce
Brest-Litovsk
Pinsk
Łódź
Pilica
Ivangorod
Radom
Lublin
Khelme
Kovel
Vistula
Bug
Kielce
Lutsk
Rovno
Dubno
San
Tarnów
Krakow
Lemberg
Gorlice
Przemyśl
Sambor
Tarnopol
Stryj

INTRODUCTION

As 1915 drew to a close, Europe remained locked in war on a scale that no previous generation had ever conceived. Everything about the conflict – the numbers of men involved, the huge demands on industrial production, the casualties, the impact upon society at large, and the strategies that would need to be followed to see it through to a conclusion – threw up challenges to which nobody appeared to have answers.

A combination of industrialisation and major improvements in public health in the second half of the 19th century led to large increases in the population of Europe, rising from about 200 million in 1800 to double that figure by 1900. The experiences of war during the 19th century resulted in most large nations adopting systems of national service followed by a variable period as a reservist; as a result, when the continent plunged over the precipice into war in the summer of 1914, all the Great Powers had the ability to field forces on a scale that dwarfed anything that had gone before.

The same industrialisation that helped increase the population of Europe also provided arms and munitions on a scale to match the huge armies that were sent into battle. Yet despite the enormous stockpiling and production of guns, bombs and shells, all armies found themselves struggling to cope with the huge consumption of resources that followed. Every army that fought in 1915 was forced to moderate its military ambitions to live within the limitations imposed by ammunition shortages, and it was only at the end of the year that all sides could begin to look forward to a time when they might have sufficient *matériel* to cope with the demands of modern warfare.

In the west, the terrible irony of the 'mobilisation' of 1914 was that hundreds of thousands of men were left facing each other in almost static front lines, subjecting each other to bombardments and assaults that left huge numbers dead or maimed without any prospect of ending the war. In many respects, the fighting on the Eastern Front was very different, with the front line moving back and forth as the vast spaces of Eastern Europe allowed armies to exploit weaker areas.

However, the very space that allowed for such movement also made a conclusive victory almost unachievable. As early as October 1914, the Germans had correctly calculated that it was impossible for armies to maintain operations more than 72 miles (120km) from their railheads, and both sides rapidly realised that there were few if any strategically vital objectives within such a radius. Consequently, although there were major advances by all sides, it was not possible to advance sufficiently far to force the other side out of the war.

The Great Powers entered the war with a clear idea of how they intended to win. Germany wished to avoid a prolonged two-front war, and opted to concentrate most of its strength against France, intending to send its victorious armies east after defeating its western opponents. Russia believed in the irresistible might of its vast armies, and anticipated a steady advance that would roll over the German and Austro-Hungarian forces, while the armies of the Austro-Hungarian Empire calculated that their best hope was to draw the full weight of the tsar's armies onto themselves, giving the Germans every opportunity to win the war in the west before the Russians could put enough forces into the field. When these initial plans failed, senior commanders struggled to come up with alternative strategies, trying usually without success to learn from the errors of the opening campaigns. To a very large extent, the one shining victory of the opening phases of the war – the German triumph at Tannenberg in September 1914 – left commanders on all sides attempting in vain to recreate the great encirclement. They repeatedly saw the endless stalemates as anomalies; the reality was that it was Tannenberg that was the anomaly, achieved at a time when there was still open ground between formations, allowing corps and armies to be outflanked – by the time they became aware of German movements, it was too late for the Russians to react. As the war continued, the density of troops prevented any such advantage being achieved.

At the outset of the war, the chief of the German general staff, and therefore the most influential figure in the military hierarchy of the Central Powers, was Helmuth von Moltke, nephew of the great visionary who had masterminded the Prussian victory over Denmark, Austria and France in the 19th century. All of his hopes rested on the execution of the great envelopment of the French Army, first proposed by Alfred von Schlieffen, whose eponymous plan failed through a combination of exhaustion, German errors and the French counterattack at the Battle of the Marne in September 1914. Overwhelmed by the pressures of defeat, Moltke suffered a breakdown in his health; he was dismissed and replaced by General Erich von Falkenhayn, formerly the German war minister, who now had to try to devise a new strategy for winning the war.

At first, Falkenhayn attempted to achieve a last-gasp victory in the west, attacking the British at Ypres in October 1914 with the intention of driving them into the sea and thus opening the northern flank of the front line for a grand envelopment. Despite narrowly failing to achieve a breakthrough, he remained convinced that overall victory in the war could only be achieved in the west – even if Russia were to suffer sufficiently catastrophic defeats to knock it out of the war, the French would continue to fight until they were defeated. However, Germany's worst nightmare of fighting a two-front war was, for the moment at least, a reality, and striking a decisive blow against France seemed impossible, at least while Russia remained strong enough to require substantial German forces to be sent east.

For the officers who planned war strategy at the beginning of the 20th century, the fate of Napoleon's *Grande Armée* remained a powerful reminder of the problems of conducting military operations in European Russia. The country was simply too large and too poor for a modern European war: the Russians could retreat with impunity as there were no vital assets within close reach of the border, and any invading army would be left stranded at the end of its lengthy lines of communication. If it had been impossible for Napoleon's army to live off the land, this would be even more so in the modern era, with much larger numbers of men. Nevertheless, of the foes that Germany faced, Russia appeared to be the one that might be defeated with the least difficulty. Consequently, 1915 saw Falkenhayn approving increasing German commitment on the Eastern Front in an attempt to drive Russia out of the war, or at the very least reduce its strength to a level where it could effectively be ignored for long enough to defeat France.

In Falkenhayn's opinion, there were several means by which Russia might be induced to leave the war. Firstly, he questioned the ability of the tsar's empire to sustain the sort of effort that was already placing such a strain on Germany:

> If such a strictly disciplined political organism as Germany, accustomed as she had been for centuries to conscientious work, and having at her disposal an inexhaustible wealth of skilled organising forces in her own people, was only barely able to accomplish the mighty tasks imposed upon her by the war, it was certain that the Russian State, so much weaker internally, would not succeed in doing this. As far as human calculations went, Russia would not be able permanently to meet the demands of such a struggle, and at the same time to effect the reconstruction of her whole economic life, which was necessitated by her sudden isolation from the outer world, owing to the closing of the western frontiers and of the Dardanelles.[1]

However, whilst it might be possible to exhaust Russia, Falkenhayn doubted that it would be possible to win a conclusive victory on the battlefield. He was therefore aware of the need to keep open diplomatic channels between Berlin and Petrograd, and repeated attempts were made throughout 1915 – largely via neutral Denmark – to persuade the tsar to abandon the war against the Central Powers. Unfortunately for Falkenhayn, the strength of the bond between Russia and its western allies was too great, and Russia steadfastly refused to contemplate a separate peace. Nevertheless, it remained possible to weaken Russia to the extent that Germany could concentrate its attention in the west.

Whilst there was general agreement in German circles that the war would ultimately be won or lost in the west, the strategy to be adopted against Russia was the subject of bitter arguments. At the beginning of the war, the only German forces that defended East Prussia against the Russians consisted of the divisions of Eighth Army, and after the army's commander, Maximilian von Prittwitz, appeared to lose confidence after a tactical defeat at Gumbinnen in August 1914, he was dismissed and replaced by General Paul von Hindenburg, with Generalmajor Erich Ludendorff as his chief of staff. Immediately, this new team enjoyed a remarkable victory when they used Eighth Army to surround and defeat the Russian Second Army at Tannenberg in September. In the months that followed, the great victory of Tannenberg, and the lesser tactical successes in the two Battles of the Masurian Lakes (September 1914 and February 1915), achieved almost legendary status, and allowed Hindenburg and Ludendorff to establish an influential power base. Falkenhayn might be chief of the general staff and thus control German forces via *Oberste Heeresleitung* (Army High Command, usually abbreviated to *OHL*), but Hindenburg rose from command of Eighth Army to the post of *Oberbefehlshaber der gesamten deutschen Streitkräfte im Osten* (Supreme Commander of all German forces in the east, usually abbreviated to *Ober Ost*).

After the failure of the First Battle of Ypres in late 1914, Hindenburg and Ludendorff openly campaigned for the dismissal of Falkenhayn, resulting in great animosity between the individuals involved. Much has been written about the internal strife in the Russian Army before and during the first years of the war, when the faction dominated by War Minister Vladimir Sukhomlinov fought for supremacy with an opposing faction of military conservatives, dominated by senior officers of Baltic German descent whose loyalty to the tsar was beyond question; the struggle between Falkenhayn and his opponents at *Ober Ost* was in its own way every bit as divisive. Falkenhayn found himself in a difficult situation, as it was clear to him that Germany urgently needed to bring the war in the east to a conclusion as quickly as possible, so that the entire strength of the German Army could be sent west. However, sending reinforcements to the east effectively strengthened *Ober Ost* and thus his enemies. His solution at the beginning of 1915 was to allow a small number of newly created reserve corps to be deployed under Hindenburg's command, but with the strict condition that they were then to be returned to *OHL* for use in the west.

Hindenburg and Ludendorff used the reinforcements to mount another operation aiming to emulate the encirclement achieved at Tannenberg. The result was the Second Battle of the Masurian Lakes in February 1915, in which they drove the Russians from the small amount of Prussian territory that they still occupied. Several Russian divisions were destroyed in the fighting, but the swift Russian withdrawal limited the encirclement to a single corps. It was effectively little more than a tactical success, and to Falkenhayn's irritation the reserve formations that had made it possible remained in the east.

Whilst Falkenhayn's disputes with *Ober Ost* were a major problem, they paled into insignificance when compared to the problems created by Germany's main ally, the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, chief of Austria-Hungary's general staff, had been a hugely important figure in the years before the war, with a hand in almost every aspect of army training and doctrine. During the years in which he dominated the training of staff officers and the drafting of manuals for the infantry, artillery and cavalry, he preached the supremacy of offensive operations, and the need to press home attacks at close quarters. The use of artillery and infantry fire to suppress defences was often ignored or minimised, and attacks were to be carried out repeatedly against the enemy's forces in order to break their will to fight. Retreat was something to be avoided at all costs, and if an enemy attack gained ground, it was vital that this ground was recovered with counterattacks as soon as possible, so that the enemy did not gain any advantage in terms of morale from his success. The importance of morale was something that Conrad repeatedly stressed – it was the currency that determined how long an army could continue offensive operations.

It was a huge tragedy for the *kaiserlich und königlich* (Imperial and Royal, usually abbreviated to *k.u.k.*, a reflection of the arrangement by which Franz Joseph was Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary) Army that Conrad was wrong in almost every respect. In their attempts to turn their chief's visions into reality, the commanders of Austria-Hungary's armies squandered hundreds of thousands of lives in the opening battles of the war, and then steadfastly failed to learn from their mistakes in the months that followed. By the end of 1915, the Germans were convinced that their ally was incapable of mounting any operations unless there was substantial German involvement, and the Russians too were aware of which of their opponents was the weakest.

The problems of the Austro-Hungarian Empire extended beyond the disastrous errors of Conrad's planning and doctrine. There was no clear war plan, other than to tie down large numbers of Russian troops until Germany could turn east in strength. Conrad repeatedly called for a grandiose pincer attack against Warsaw, with Austro-Hungarian troops advancing from the south while German forces pressed down from East Prussia in the north, but the Germans never agreed to such a plan before the war, and its implementation once hostilities began was beyond the limited resources available. Although the ruthless mobilisation of reserves and the shortening of basic training to an absolute minimum allowed the *k.u.k.* Army to recover its numerical strength after the crippling losses of 1914, the delicate structure of the regiments and divisions was lost forever. The multi-lingual and multi-national empire had organised its regiments along national lines, with officers speaking the same language as their men; as reserves were poured in to refill the depleted ranks, it proved impossible to maintain this arrangement. With growing alienation between officers and men, the forces of Austria-Hungary were already showing signs of war-weariness by the first winter of the war, and by the end of 1915 there were persistent concerns about the reliability of many formations, particularly those made up of Czech and Ruthenian (Ukrainian) personnel.

After the failure of *Ober Ost* to strike a decisive blow against Russia in early 1915, attention turned elsewhere on the Eastern Front. Bitter fighting in the Carpathian Mountains had reduced the forces of Germany's ally to a desperate state, and in an attempt to reduce pressure on them, Falkenhayn planned a counterattack in what is now southern Poland, between Gorlice and Tarnów. Led by Generalfeldmarschall August von Mackensen, the predominantly German forces were subject to a complex command arrangement by which they were technically subordinate to Conrad's *Armee Oberkommando* (Army High Command, or *AOK*), though Conrad had to clear any orders he issued with Falkenhayn. The result was that *Ober Ost*, nominally in charge of all German forces on the Eastern Front, was left without any say in the new offensive.

Backed by heavy artillery, Mackensen moved forward in measured advances, first reaching the Galician capital Lemberg, and then turning north towards Brest-Litovsk. Unable to stop the advance, the Russians were forced to abandon all of their territory in Poland and parts of Belarus. For much of the summer, the men at *Ober Ost* – an expression used for Hindenburg himself, his headquarters, and even the expanse of Russian territory controlled by Hindenburg's troops –

who had conspired against Falkenhayn at the beginning of the year could only watch with frustration and envy as their comrades marched inexorably forward. A diversionary attack into Lithuania by *Ober Ost* slowly turned into a separate offensive, and Hindenburg and Ludendorff, the heroes of 1914 who in the eyes of the public had saved Germany from the Russian steamroller with their victory at Tannenberg, repeatedly demanded greater priority in terms of reinforcements and munitions so that they could advance deeper into Russian territory. One every occasion, Falkenhayn refused, much to the frustration of all at *Ober Ost*. It was inevitable that these refusals were seen as personal slights, and increased the animosity between the two opposed camps within the German Army. Finally, late in the campaign season in 1915, *OHL* authorised advances by the German troops in Lithuania and Latvia, but it was too late for them to achieve the deep penetrations that had originally been envisaged. Nevertheless, as 1915 drew to a close, although Russia remained obdurate in the face of German diplomatic feelers, the Germans could claim considerable success. Falkenhayn had succeeded in neutralising Russian power for the moment, and would be able to turn his attention elsewhere in his attempts to bring the war to a satisfactory conclusion. He had also neutralised his opponents within the German military. Max Hoffmann, a senior staff officer at *Ober Ost* and an active anti-Falkenhayn plotter, wrote in his diary in early January 1916:

> The moment when Hindenburg could do something against Falkenhayn is long gone. Time has plucked all the trumps from his [Hindenburg's] hand. Times have changed, the days of our achievements are far in the past, as are the times of his blunders, such as Ypres etc. Under the current kaiser, I regard the prospect for change as gone.[2]

Russia entered the war with a mixture of trepidation and expectation. In many respects, its armies were still recovering from the shock of defeat in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05, and there was a widespread view amongst Russian military circles that the German Army was the most formidable force in Europe. However, this was tempered by the knowledge that in the opening phases of the war, Germany would be fully occupied in attempting to overcome France, and there would thus be an opportunity for an early strike by Russian forces. Indeed, Entente strategy required such a strike in order to force Germany to divert troops away from the west, and the French had helped finance the railroads that would be essential for rapid Russian deployment. When the war began, a variety of issues – difficult terrain, errors by senior officers, inadequate supplies and skilful

German ripostes – resulted in repeated setbacks. Although Russian armies scored repeated successes against the forces of Austria-Hungary, they failed to make any serious impression on the Germans throughout the opening months of the war. When they succeeded in surrounding a group of German divisions to the east of Łódź in November 1914, they failed spectacularly to hold on to them; despite being outnumbered, the German force showed great resolution and determination to fight its way back to the German line through the winter snow, even taking its substantial haul of prisoners with it.

In 1915, the Russian Army found itself drawn into a terrible battle of attrition in the Carpathians, bloodily repulsing repeated attempts by the *k.u.k.* Army to break through towards the north and trying to advance out of the mountains onto the Hungarian plain. The front line elsewhere became dangerously thin as troops were sent into the mountain battles, particularly immediately north of the Carpathians, where Mackensen's offensive broke through in the spring. Constantly off balance, the Russians fell back from one improvised line to another, though their greater willingness to face reality later in the year allowed them to withdraw with far fewer losses than those of the first defeat at Gorlice–Tarnów in May. Nevertheless, the disasters that the Russian Army suffered had inevitable consequences. Grand Duke Nikolai, uncle of the tsar, was dismissed as supreme commander. His replacement, to the consternation and surprise of most people, was Tsar Nicholas himself. It would have been a brave decision in any circumstances to take command of a beaten, demoralised army; for a man with almost no military experience, certainly none at the highest level, it was an astonishing gamble in several respects. The military risks were obvious to all, but by late 1915 there was growing unrest throughout the Russian Empire, and the association of the tsar with further military failures carried its own risks.

As winter set in and all sides paused to consider the future, there were the beginnings of some ideas of how the war might be brought to a conclusion. None of the strategies adopted by the belligerents in 1914 had proved to be effective on the battlefield, but in 1915 the Germans had found a way of sustaining an advance through the use of heavy artillery to suppress defences, followed by deliberate and often lengthy pauses while further ammunition was brought forward and preparations completed for another 'push'. This was the means by which Mackensen advanced across southern Poland and into Belarus, and was then replicated during the advance into Serbia in the autumn. However, such tactics might work on the Eastern Front, but were less likely to succeed in France, where both sides occupied heavily fortified positions in depth. Here, a different strategy would be needed.

Both the Entente and the Central Powers – the latter largely in the form of Falkenhayn's *OHL* – came to very similar conclusions. The war would be won by exhausting the resources of the enemy. On 6 December 1915, representatives from Britain, France, Russia and Italy met in Chantilly to discuss how to proceed. Marshal Joseph Joffre, the French supreme commander, produced a detailed memorandum in which he placed the blame for allied failures on a lack of coordination:

> [The setbacks are due to] the independence with which each ally has conducted the war, each on his own front and in particular according to his own opinion.[3]

If the war was to be prosecuted to a successful conclusion, Joffre argued, the Entente would have to coordinate its attacks in a more rational manner. Although all parties agreed to this, Joffre's memoirs describe his continuing misgivings about his allies. He feared that the British wished to reduce their commitment to the Western Front and preferred to direct their resources against Turkey in the Middle East, and he expressed exasperation at the lack of honesty on the part of the Russian delegates at the conference:

> One incident at the conference highlighted this tendency to dissimulate. During the session on 7 December, I invited the representatives of the allied armies to summarise the situations of their armies; General [Yakov Gregoreyevich] Zhilinsky [who had been commander of the Russian Northwest Front at the beginning of the war, and was widely regarded as a courtier rather than a serious military figure] was the first to speak and energetically disputed the figure that we knew represented the effective strength of the Russian armies. Where, according to us, the effective strength did not exceed 1.5 million, the general pretended that they had reached a strength of 2.7 million men. The difference was substantial. In order to validate our figure, I offered to read out a telegram I had received from Petrograd … that was very clear on the subject of Russian strength; the general opposed the reading of the document. I passed it to him, he read it very rapidly, and flushing strongly, he thrust it into his briefcase.[4]

Nor did he make any attempt to hide his exasperation at the apparent inability of Russia to exert any pressure upon the Central Powers, leaving Zhilinsky to report back to his superiors that Joffre behaved as if only France was fighting the Central Powers with anything approaching adequate commitment.[5]

The conference concluded with an agreement that all Entente Powers resolved to coordinate their attacks in a move designed to prevent the Germans from moving troops from one crisis to another. It was hoped that such pressure would precipitate a collapse at some point in the east or west, though Joffre continued to harbour doubts about whether his allies would actually comply with the agreement.[6]

The problem for the French, British, Russians and Italians was that whilst they might have come to an agreement on strategy, the tactical means of delivering that strategy continued to elude them. None of the French attacks in Champagne or the British attacks at Neuve Chapelle and Loos had achieved the sort of breakthrough enjoyed by the Germans in the east, and the armies of Italy, whose intervention in the war had been expected to produce great results, had battered themselves in vain against the Austro-Hungarian defences along the River Isonzo, despite enjoying a substantial numerical advantage. In the east, the Russians had undoubtedly achieved substantial successes against the forces of the *k.u.k.* Army, and even against German formations, but Joffre was not alone in doubting the ability of Russia to achieve a decisive result. However, Joffre could console himself with the fact that even if Italy and Russia could not break the enemy lines, they could be expected to reduce the ability of Germany to concentrate its forces in the west, where France's armies might then be able to secure a decisive victory.

At a time when – with some difficulty and reservation – the Entente Powers were moving closer to an agreed strategy, the Central Powers were heading in completely the opposite direction. At various points throughout the war, the Germans had proposed a centralised command structure for the Eastern Front, with – naturally – a German general appointed at its head, and Vienna had rejected the suggestion on every occasion, largely for reasons of national prestige. Relations between Falkenhayn, who was in many respects the epitome of the professional Prussian soldier, and his opposite number, Conrad, had never been good, and deteriorated steadily through 1915. At the end of the year, after the defeat of Serbia, Conrad rejected the advice of Falkenhayn and ordered his armies to attack Montenegro. This resulted in the almost complete breakdown of relations and a period of no meaningful communication between the headquarters of the two allies, at a moment that would prove critical.

The issue that triggered the rift was the command of the Austro-Hungarian Third Army, led by General Hermann von Kövesz von Kövessháza. For the duration of the Serbian campaign, Kövesz was under the command of Mackensen, who had moved to the Serbian front after his successes against the Russians. With Serbia defeated, Conrad informed Falkenhayn that he was removing Kövesz from this command arrangement and would be using Third Army for the operation against Montenegro. He saw this assault as part of securing the flank of any future attack towards the south to drive the Entente forces from Salonika.

Falkenhayn insisted that he had known nothing about the Austro-Hungarian plan to strike at Montenegro, something strongly denied by Conrad who claimed – with some justification – that he had made no secret of this intention throughout the planning of the Balkan operation. August Cramon, the German liaison officer with Conrad's headquarters, later wrote about the dispute:

> In all loyalty I must record that between mid-November and Christmas Conrad had repeatedly informed our army leadership of his plans with regard to Montenegro and Albania. Frankly, I cannot say to what extent Falkenhayn agreed with these plans. From my written notes, it is not clear whether he ever decided to reject Conrad's proposals. It seems to me that he increasingly adopted a dilatory attitude, which in view of the unclear overall situation was indeed not unreasonable. In mid-December he advised Conrad of the urgent requirement to withdraw German troops from the Eastern Front and therefore regarded it necessary that instead of tying up the surplus divisions of Kövesz's army in the Albanian and Montenegrin mountains, they should be sent east; in view of this requirement, he perhaps regarded it as necessary to abandon the Montenegrin operation.[7]

Conrad's reply was swift. He was not prepared to abandon the invasion of Montenegro, and in any case had already issued orders for the withdrawal of Third Army from Mackensen's control. Falkenhayn objected strongly to what he regarded as a *fait accompli*, complaining to Berlin that he had not consented to this in any way; given his high-handed treatment of Conrad at various points in 1915, there is a certain irony about this objection to *AOK* acting without full consultation. Cramon was summoned to a meeting with Falkenhayn:

> He summoned me to Oderberg and told me without any circumlocution that he no longer trusted *AOK* … I pointed out that the continuation of the war in the same successful manner would be unthinkable without the personal cooperation of the two chiefs of staff. Falkenhayn agreed with me but held to his point of view that mutually profitable cooperation was impossible. I would have to use my skills to put matters right.[8]

It proved to be a difficult task. Conrad was convinced that he was in the right, and was persuaded with difficulty to write to Falkenhayn apologising for any misunderstanding. It took a month for this letter to appear, during which the two allies proceeded to draw up their plans for the coming year with little regard to each other.

In keeping with his long-term strategy, Falkenhayn intended to concentrate his efforts for 1916 in the west, with the intention of drawing the French Army into a battle of attrition at Verdun. A relatively modest advance would see his troops able to deploy artillery on the high ground that dominated the fortress city, and he then intended to bombard the French into defeat: either they could choose to defend Verdun in what would become a hugely costly battle, or they could face the ignominy of abandoning a high-prestige position. Falkenhayn's plans for this were, to an extent at least, based upon the belief that the armies of the Austro-Hungarian Empire would continue to concentrate on the Eastern Front, so that should the Russians show any signs of recovery, they would still be faced by considerable forces. Ignorant of Falkenhayn's plans, Conrad intended to return to a plan that he had proposed on several occasions – an attack on Italy, designed to knock the Italians out of the war and end Italian claims to Austro-Hungarian territory.

Ultimately, neither plan would succeed, due to a combination of the formidable obstacles they faced and miscalculations by both Falkenhayn and Conrad. Lack of coordination between the two powers did not play a substantial part, but it led to weakness in the east, particularly in the southern part of the front that was held by the *k.u.k.* Army, at a time when Russia finally managed to raise and equip enough troops to mount a powerful offensive. A year that began with high hopes of final victory for the Central Powers would become one that brought the forces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire close to complete collapse, and in attempting to discharge its obligations from the conference at Chantilly, tsarist Russia would fulfil Falkenhayn's prediction about its abilities to sustain the effort of a prolonged modern war.

CHAPTER 1

THE FRUITS OF WAR: THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES AND THE OPPOSING ARMIES

Many of Europe's military decision-makers wrote after the war – with varying degrees of justification – that they had foreseen that the conflict would be long, costly and difficult to win. However farsighted they might have been, all of Europe's Great Powers entered the war prepared and equipped for a short, if brutal, conflict. When the high expectations of offensive strategies failed to be fulfilled, all sides struggled to adapt to the reality of the fighting, which stubbornly refused to respond to all pre-existing theories of military operations.

In short, the problem was one of war fought with the firepower of modern industry and the numerical strength created by a century of considerable population growth, but marred by problems of mobility. All armies remained critically dependent upon railways – it was simply impossible to move the quantities of supplies required by any other means. Once troops deployed in the field, mobility was limited to the speed of marching men. It rapidly became clear that an army with even a modicum of competent organisation could withdraw faster than an attacker could pursue, and any advance ran out of momentum once it stretched too far from the critical railheads. In theory, horses had been expected to provide at least a degree of faster mobility, but cavalry proved to be ineffective. Tactics used by the mounted formations of all sides were poorly thought through and ineffective, and cavalry units lacked the firepower to prevail against almost any sort of defence. In addition, the burden of supplying fodder for horses added its own strain to supply networks that struggled to keep pace with the demands of field armies; for example, the Russians had to devote more rail capacity to horse fodder than supplies for soldiers.

The German plans for the war have been analysed in great depth, with some recent works even questioning whether the famed 'Schlieffen Plan' actually existed.[9] Even Schlieffen doubted that the German Army was sufficiently strong to carry out his proposed encirclement, but in the absence of any other realistic alternative, the Germans launched their armies across their western borders in August 1914. At first, the advance appeared to go well, but ultimately it foundered at the Battle of the Marne in September. Falkenhayn's attempt to secure victory at Ypres late in the year also failed, precipitating a radical rethink of strategy. Having concentrated so long on a decisive knockout blow against France before turning east, the Germans had no credible alternative for winning the war, and, the factions within the German military system had differing views of how to conduct the war, though there was general agreement that an attempt should be made to knock Russia out of the war before turning on France. The divergence centred more on how this should be achieved; Falkenhayn favoured the minimum possible expenditure of effort and resources, whereas *Ober Ost* rapidly developed ambitions for major conquest.

There has been much argument about Germany's war aims. Although most nations had been preparing for war for many years prior to 1914, there is little clear evidence that German statesmen and soldiers had given much thought to what they wished to achieve, other than decisive defeats of France and Russia in order to eliminate the immediate threats that Germany faced, particularly in light of Russian rearmament and modernisation. Despite years of expectation and preparation, the avalanche of events in the summer of 1914 plunged the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires into a war that they characterised as one that was imposed upon them. The assassinations in Sarajevo, the uncompromising support of Russia for Serbia, the equally intransigent support of France for Russia, allowed the governments, newspapers and even the clergy of the Central Powers to portray the conflict as one in which Germany and Austria-Hungary were fighting for their survival, surrounded by foes who wished to deny them their fundamental right to exist.[10] Kaiser Wilhelm II told his people:

> We are not incited by lust for conquest. We are inspired by the unyielding determination to keep for ourselves and all future generations the place which God has given us.[11]

In September 1914, when it seemed quite likely that the Schlieffen Plan was about to succeed, thoughts began to turn to how the future security of the

Central Powers might be safeguarded. Kurt Riezler, an official in the foreign policy section of the German chancellor's office, had accompanied Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg on a visit to *OHL* in early August. Despite the enthusiasm and confidence that he witnessed there, Riezler recorded in his diary that war remained a gamble.[12] Discussions with staff officers began to shape his view of what Germany should attempt to achieve, as he wrote on 19 August:

> [There was a] meeting all evening about Poland and the possibility of a loose affiliation of other states with the Reich – a mid-European system of different customs zones. [This would be] Germany with Belgium, Holland and Poland under close protection, Austria under looser protection.[13]

The significance of this entry is the first use by Riezler of the concept of *Mitteleuropa* to describe a future settlement. There were many factions who wished for substantial territorial adjustments: industrialists sought to secure raw materials and captive markets; others wished to establish coaling stations that would provide greater maritime independence. Riezler himself expressed concern at the profusion of demands, and urged the German government's press secretary, Otto Hammann, to try to damp down the numerous calls that were being made, at least until the military situation became clearer.[14]

On 9 September, Riezler wrote a document that became known as the September Programme, the first attempt to formulate policy for a post-war settlement. Riezler summed up the cardinal aims of his proposals at the beginning of the document:

> [Our aim is] the security of the German Empire for all imaginable time in the west and east. To this end, France must be so weakened that it cannot be restored to Great Power status, [and] Russia must be driven as far as possible from the German frontier and its hegemony over the non-Russian vassal peoples must be broken.[15]

This was a very deliberate departure from any attempt to restore any delicate balance of power in Europe; like many staff officers at *OHL*, Riezler concluded that the failure of this balance to prevail in the summer of 1914 was what had led to the great gamble of a pan-European war, something that he intended to avoid at all costs in the foreseeable future. In order to achieve this state of safety, Riezler proposed substantial penalties on France. There would be huge reparations, sufficient to fund war pensions for Germany's troops and to pay off its national debt. Changes along the border would deprive France of valuable iron mines, and the chain of fortresses built to deter a German invasion would be destroyed, leaving France permanently vulnerable to attack from Germany.

Even at this early stage of the war, Riezler and others had no doubt that while France had been implacably hostile towards Germany since the end of the Franco-Prussian War of 1871, Britain posed a threat that in many respects was even greater, not least because of the difficulties of invading the British Isles. In order to put Germany in a better position to deal with Britain in any future conflict, France would also be required to cede a coastal strip from Boulogne to Dunkirk. France would be tied to Germany by trade agreements that would exclude Britain from the continental market, and Belgium – stripped of the fortress city of Liège, and with Antwerp also under German control – would be reduced to the status of a vassal nation, entirely dependent upon Germany. Luxembourg would become a state within the German Empire, and a new economic region consisting ultimately of all of continental Europe would be established under German control. The territories that Russia would lose, stretching from the Baltic region through the Ukraine to the Caucasus, would also be part of this economic area, effectively providing Germany with a continental empire that would eliminate the possibility of a British blockade being an effective weapon in any future conflict. British trade within this area would explicitly be controlled or even blocked.

The status of the September Programme has been the subject of much argument. The German historian Fritz Fischer's case for German culpability in the outbreak of war was based upon the existence of the programme, reasoning that such a radical document must have been based on pre-existing plans; he attempted to link it to a conference of 1912 in which Kaiser Wilhelm and his senior military officials agreed on a war of aggression in the summer of 1914. Others have responded that whatever might have been agreed at the kaiser's 1912 conference, there is no concrete evidence to suggest that Riezler's programme was based upon any pre-existing plan, or that the military personnel at the conference regarded the proposal of an offensive war as anything more than one of many plans. Whatever the relative merits of these arguments, the detail of Riezler's plans and their concordance with the views of so many senior figures within the German military establishment both confirm that the programme represented a school of thought that had considerable support. At no stage did Germany officially adopt the details of the programme, and many within the establishment, notably Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg and Falkenhayn, regarded such aims as excessive and unattainable; Otto Hammann quoted the chancellor as describing the proposals as 'a covetous nationalism that wants to annex half the world', and it is clear that within days of the drafting of Riezler's programme, the chancellor was already accepting that many of its objectives might prove unattainable.[16] Others, such as a group of right-wing bodies who referred to themselves as the 'Six Economic Associations', demanded even more, wishing to subjugate Belgium entirely, and to annex large portions of northern France as well as establishing a colonial empire in Africa. A petition in support of such proposals in 1915 received the support of over 1,300 prominent officials and academics, while a response advising that annexation of independent non-German people might create greater difficulties than it solved was supported by barely 140.[17] Drawing on the themes of the September Programme, Friedrich Naumann published his book *Mitteleuropa* in 1915, describing in some detail how Germany could establish hegemony over much of Central and Eastern Europe. For him, the only way that this could be achieved was by war, and not only because force of arms could impose such a rearrangement of borders, as he made clear in the opening sentences of his book:

> As I write this, there is fighting in the east and west. I deliberately write this in the middle of the war, as it is only in wartime that there is the mood to consider transformative thoughts. After the war, normal sentiments will once more rapidly emerge from hiding, and it will not be possible to create *Mitteleuropa* with such normal sentiments. Just as Bismarck established the German Empire in war in 1870 and not after the war, so in war must our state's leaders establish the basis of a new order, while blood flows and the people have the will. Later, it would be too late.[18]

To a large extent, the only major body publicly to oppose such ambitions was the Social Democratic Party, which continued to insist that Germany's workers were fighting for the defence of Germany, not conquest. Falkenhayn's objection to such talk of conquest was based upon military and diplomatic pragmatism. He calculated that it was beyond the power of the German Army to defeat all of the Entente Powers sufficiently to enforce such annexations. One or more of Germany's foes should be tempted to make peace, and this meant limiting Germany's demands to an acceptable level. However, in the heady days of late summer in 1914, such thoughts seemed overly pessimistic, and as the human and material cost of the war became ever greater, so it grew harder to consider accepting modest post-war aims.

Support for this reshaping of Europe was particularly strong in the Austrian parts of the Dual Monarchy. The new *Mitteleuropa* would allow Austria to become less reliant on its difficult relationship with Hungary. Predictably, there were those within the Dual Monarchy who feared this new arrangement and saw it as a threat; István Tisza, the Hungarian prime minister, objected strongly, recognising that it would reduce Hungary in particular, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire in general, to little more than a vassal state of Germany. Partly due to this fear, and partly due to the constant tensions between Vienna and Budapest, the first stage of implementing the economic part of *Mitteleuropa* – a customs agreement between the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires – was not agreed until 1918, and was not put before the respective parliaments for ratification before the war came to an end.

As Russia's forces were driven from the parts of Poland that had been under the rule of the tsars since the last independent Polish state was partitioned, the issue of what to do with Poland became increasingly important. The vagueness of German policy towards any future Polish settlement undermines Fischer's case that Germany consciously planned a war of aggression with the intention of securing major territorial gains in the east; if any such plan had existed, there surely would have been more detailed consideration about what to do with the first territory that was likely to fall into German hands. By contrast, Vienna made an early claim to Poland. Leopold von Andrian was an Austrian diplomat who was consul-general in Warsaw prior to the war, and when he returned to Vienna at the beginning of hostilities he was assigned a role in shaping Austria-Hungary's war aims. He had previously been a proponent of expanding the empire towards the northeast, and he returned to Poland in February 1915 where together with Hugo von Hoffmansthal, an Austrian literary figure who had been recruited into government service, he continued to proselytise about Austria's mission to bring civilisation to Eastern Europe. As the year progressed, though, the character of his public pronouncements and private writing changed, not least due to the growing interest of Austria-Hungary's ally. At first, Germany appeared content to allow Austria-Hungary to develop its policy in Poland, but the reality was that it was German force of arms that drove the Russians east, and there was therefore a growing appetite in Germany for a bigger say in what happened in Poland. An additional motive for German territorial acquisition was the experience of Russian occupation of parts of East Prussia in 1914. There had been widespread looting, rape and killing, albeit at a far lower level than the same region would experience in 1945, and during the first winter of the war, Adolf Tortilowicz von Batocki-Friebe, the president of East Prussia, had written a memorandum expressing the need for a buffer zone around current German territory.[19]

At first, Andrian had seen Poland as a territory disputed both physically and culturally by Russia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but by the end of the year, Andrian and other Austro-Hungarian officials rapidly realised that their intentions towards Poland were more likely to be hindered by their ally than by Russia.[20] Nevertheless, Andrian pressed forward with his plans to tie Poland to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, making much of one of the few common factors between the two countries – their Roman Catholicism – to arrange celebrations of Emperor Franz Joseph's birthday in Warsaw in August 1915. Kurt Riezler, the author of the September Programme, visited him in October, an encounter that left Andrian increasingly conscious of German rivalry. Immediately after, he returned to Vienna, and then travelled to Berlin where he had another meeting with Riezler; here, Andrian discovered that Riezler had met senior Polish figures and had begun discussions about a possible semi-independent Polish state that was part of the German Empire, modelled loosely on the arrangement with Bavaria. At the time, Berlin was still officially in accord with Vienna's vision of Poland as being in the Austro-Hungarian sphere of influence, and Andrian made the first of several outspoken attacks on German policy; these were sufficiently strident that Gottfried Hohenlohe, the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Berlin, felt compelled to raise the issue with German officials. At a meeting with Gottlieb von Jagow, the German foreign minister, Hohenlohe was reassured that Andrian's interpretation of matters was exaggerated.[21] Nevertheless, the Germans began to show reluctance to support Vienna's preferred option of combining Congress Poland with Galicia.

German policy was already developing in a divergent direction from that of Austria-Hungary. Whilst the latter wished to create a new province of the Habsburg Empire, many Germans began to articulate a somewhat different vision. In his memorandum of December 1914, President von Batocki proposed that all non-German people in the border strip that he wished to create should be expelled, and perhaps replaced by ethnic Germans currently living within Russia in some sort of exchange. He attempted to minimise any humanitarian concerns by suggesting that village and town communities could be exchanged en masse in an orderly manner. Whilst such suggestions appear to be forerunners of the policies of Nazi Germany, it should be remembered that similar forcible expulsions of civilians – in this case Germans – from East Prussia, Silesia and Pomerania – were part of the Potsdam Agreement after the Second World War, in which it was stated:

> The Three Governments, having considered the question in all its aspects, recognize that the transfer to Germany of German populations, or elements

> thereof, remaining in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, will have to be undertaken. They agree that any transfers that take place should be effected in an orderly and humane manner.[22]

The result of the Potsdam Agreement was immense suffering, with many of the Germans being mistreated, robbed, raped or even killed. Had Batocki's plan been implemented, it is likely that it would have had similar consequences. The German government might have toyed with such ideas, but made no attempt to implement them; some in military circles, such as Ludendorff, were more enthusiastic about such an approach, but had their hands full with the conduct of the war.

Although the proposals to expel all Slavs and Jews from the territory that Batocki wished to annex sound repugnant, they should be considered in context. Mass expulsion of ethnic groups was a practice that was widespread at the time. The Russians commenced a policy of deportations as soon as they occupied Galicia, and internal forcible movements had been practised within the tsar's empire for decades. The Turkish treatment of Armenians was even more extreme, with up to 20,000 being killed in 1909, and further deportations and killings over the following years. The Western Powers were not immune to such practices. It was only two generations since the United States had confined Native Americans to small reservations, and as soon as they recaptured parts of Alsace and Lorraine in 1914, the French systematically expelled those that they regarded as being insufficiently French.

Austrian plans for acquisition of land to the northeast were unpopular in Hungary as well as in Germany. The creation of new provinces within the empire might threaten Hungarian influence, and in an attempt to accommodate their concerns a complex plan was drawn up, ensuring that any new state created out of Poland would not have the same status as Austria or Hungary. However, all of these considerations were largely academic. The Germans might not have decided finally what they wished to do with Poland, but they had concluded that the Austro-Hungarian proposals were not acceptable. One of the reasons was that there was growing concern that the absorption of such a large number of Slavs into the Austro-Hungarian Empire would threaten the close association between the Central Powers, and that Austria-Hungary might find itself tempted to join some future Slav anti-German faction. Instead of allowing Vienna to establish its control over former Russian Poland, the Germans moved forward to create a *Generalgouvernement* in Warsaw to oversee the territories occupied by German troops. The officers of *Ober Ost* expected that this new Polish administration would be under their control, but they were bitterly disappointed when Falkenhayn ensured that the head of the new *Generalgouvernement* would be Generaloberst Hans Hartwig von Beseler, an artillery expert who had overseen the assault on the Russian fortress of Novogeorgievsk and, more importantly, was a close ally of Falkenhayn.

Beseler made up for his lack of experience in administering such a territory, and his ignorance about Poland, by reading and consulting widely. He also cooperated with a civilian administration led by Wolfgang von Kries that worked alongside his office, but nevertheless thoroughly exploited the region. Timber and agricultural produce was shipped away to Germany in large amounts, often leaving locals short of food; as a result of shortages of food and other essentials, the death rate in Warsaw doubled during the war. High levels of taxation further added to the misery of the Poles, leaving them less able to obtain whatever food might have been available on the black market. Workers were drafted for labour both in Poland and in Germany, and often failed to receive the low levels of pay that they had been promised. The opening of schools and permission to speak Polish in the University of Warsaw did little to reduce resentment of German occupation.

Whilst there may have been disagreements between Berlin and Vienna about the fate of the parts of Poland formerly occupied by Russia, there could be no argument about the Baltic region. Here, the Germans occupied much of what is now Lithuania and Latvia during 1915, and *Ober Ost* had no intention of allowing these territories to be removed from its control. As food shortages in Germany became more widespread throughout 1915, Ludendorff began to consider how the occupied territories could be exploited to try to remedy matters. In his memoirs, he described the state of the countryside that the German armies seized:

> The land was in a neglected state as a consequence of the war, and only where we had been in position for some time was there any order. The retreating Russians had taken the population with them, some willingly. Some had hidden in the great forests and now returned home. Nevertheless, many rural dwellings remained abandoned. The fields were not tended … the Russian authorities and judiciary, the entire Russian occupation machinery and the local intelligentsia had abandoned the land. There was no police or gendarmerie, and only the clergy had any real authority.
>
> … In the cities, particularly in Vilna, Kovno, and Grodno, serious food shortages developed straight after they were occupied, and worsened and spread to other towns. Firewood was not available in adequate quantities.

> Apart from the German minority, the population was unfamiliar to us. The Balts in particular welcomed the German troops … the Lithuanians believed that the hour of their liberation had come; but when the better times that they hoped for did not begin immediately due to the inflexible necessities of war, they became more distant and mistrustful. The Poles adopted a hostile posture … the Jews did not know what face they should put on things, but they made no difficulties for us, and we were able to communicate with them, which was by no means the case with the Poles, Lithuanians and Latvians. These language difficulties were very severe and cannot be overstated. As a result of a shortage of relevant German literature, we knew very little of the situation of the land and people, and it seemed a completely new world to us.
>
> In this territory, roughly the size of East and West Prussia, Posen and Pomerania combined, we were faced by a huge task: everything had to be constructed and ordered from scratch. First, order and peace had to be established in the rear of the army and spies removed. The land had to be tended and put to use for the provision of food for the armies and homeland as well as for other supplies for the troops and our war economy.[23]

This summary, particularly the last paragraph, reveals some critical points. Whilst the Russians had removed a great deal of infrastructure in their withdrawal, the intention of the Germans to establish their own regime regardless of local customs and practice rapidly alienated what support there might have been for them. Fearing unrest, espionage and even the spread of disease, the Germans imposed strict movement restrictions, which resulted not only in resentment but also in dislocation of all aspects of everyday life. Compulsory labour, with minimal levels of pay, created further ill feeling.

In particular, although Ludendorff was keen to exploit the new territories, it is noteworthy that agricultural production for the needs of the indigenous population did not feature at all in his list of priorities. To make matters worse, inflexible demands for agricultural produce that could be used by the army or sent back to Germany resulted in too little seed being left for sowing the next year's crop. Nevertheless, a great deal was achieved. Hundreds of bridges, railway lines and roads were either constructed from scratch or rebuilt, and new agricultural industries were established. There was considerable investment in schools and other infrastructure, but all under the strict and inflexible control of the army.[24] Resistance was sporadic and spontaneous at first, but usually resulted in severe repression, with villages being burned and many locals killed. As the war continued, the local population hit back with repeated attacks on German warehouses and the assassination of German officials and police.

Further south, another region was also coming to terms with occupation by the Central Powers. After resisting two Austro-Hungarian invasions in 1914, Serbia was attacked again in the autumn of 1915, this time by a combined force of German and Austro-Hungarian formations, led by August von Mackensen. After a comparatively brief campaign, Serbia's army was forced to retreat through Kosovo to the sea, at first in an attempt to establish an enclave where it could be resupplied by Britain and France, and then for evacuation to the island of Corfu. Falkenhayn had approved the campaign in order to knock Serbia out of the war and thus allow Austro-Hungarian forces to be freed for deployment elsewhere, notably against Italy and Russia, and the German involvement in the region was rapidly reduced as the fighting died down. Conrad, his Austro-Hungarian counterpart, was prone to oscillating wildly between despondency and overenthusiastic confidence, and as Serbian resistance collapsed he bombarded Vienna with a series of memoranda about the future of Serbia. He was prepared to tolerate independence for Albania and Montenegro, provided that both remained firmly within Vienna's sphere of influence, but insisted that Serbia should be incorporated into the Austro-Hungarian Empire:

> Serbia is to be removed from the ranks of European states with a single coercive diplomatic act that would be ratified to a certain extent by the military situation; its criminal culpability for having provoked a World War should thus be accentuated. To this end it should, in agreement with the German and Bulgarian governments, be declared that: firstly, Serbia has ceased to exist; secondly, the Karadjordević dynasty has accordingly ceased to rule; thirdly, the area of today's Kingdom of Serbia comes under military administration as agreed by the three allies that retain the right, also to be agreed upon mutually, to decide the future division of the entire territory.[25]

Others disagreed, particularly Prime Minister Tisza in Budapest. During the long years of antagonism between Serbia and the Dual Monarchy, Tisza had always cautioned against annexation of Serbia after any war, on the grounds that South Slav populations within the empire were already restive, and the absorption of Serbia would create more problems than it would solve. In December 1915 he wrote a memorandum listing his concerns, as well as his alternative proposals:

> Another one and a half to two million Serbs will not only change the numerical balance of forces but will also revive the nationalist aspirations and hopes of Serbs in our state, and the Hungarian state will be threatened with the loss of its true

> identity. If ascendancy is gained by centrifugal elements, or even those elements that do not actually oppose the state but are indifferent, Hungary will lose its coherence, and the entire Monarchy will lose the most important living strength that is essential for it to withstand victoriously the gigantic shift of power in this World War … The inclusion of all Serbs would certainly not kill off the Greater Serb idea – on the contrary! An increase in the number of Serb subjects in the Monarchy by unifying all Serbs under the sceptre of one ruler, an increase in the Serb element as compared with others from the same ethnicity, or the creation of a huge majority of Orthodox Serbs compared to Croats will intensify Greater Serb propaganda.
>
> Serbia should lose its eastern and southern parts that have been promised to Bulgaria. We should also annex its northwest corner and thus cut it off completely from the Rivers Save and Danube … A third possible annexation would include territories inhabited by Albanians. For its future existence Serbdom would then comprise a reduced Montenegro cut off from the sea, and the western part of Central Serbia, a mountainous region far from river routes and largely infertile. It would thus be crushed between stronger neighbours and economically would be totally dependent on the Monarchy.[26]

In keeping with attitudes throughout Europe, Tisza intended that ethnic Austrians and Hungarians would settle the northern territories seized by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, ultimately reducing the Slav population to a minority. In addition to securing the region, this would create a physical barrier between what was left of Serbia and South Slav populations within the empire to the immediate north of the Danube.

Stephan Burián, the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister, did not agree with Tisza's position, and in late November 1915 told a German diplomat that it was impossible to consider any option other than complete annexation of Serbia. By early 1915, this viewpoint had hardened, leaving Tisza isolated in the Austro-Hungarian Joint Council of Ministers. The only crumb of comfort offered to him was that any territory annexed in the Balkans would be assigned to Hungary.[27]

Discussions about the precise arrangements for occupied Serbia would drag on for some time. Whilst Germany had no territorial ambitions in the area, there were considerable German economic interests in the Balkans, and Berlin therefore expected to have a big say in how the territory was administered. Bulgaria, without whose involvement the attack against Serbia would have been far harder to execute successfully, had been promised considerable territorial gains and now that the fighting was over, demanded additional areas. The Germans were willing to concede this in return for the right to manage and exploit mining and railway resources in the Bulgarian sector. Matters were further complicated by the fact that the Bulgarian Army had actually occupied some parts of southern Serbia and Kosovo that had not been promised to it at the outset, and the Austro-Hungarian authorities watched with increasing alarm as the Bulgarians proceeded to set up administrative departments in these disputed areas. Eventually, Mackensen – who had led the Central Powers forces in their invasion of Serbia – was appointed to mediate between Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria, and after lengthy negotiations a new demarcation line was agreed.

Much as was the case in German-administered Poland, there were both civilian and military authorities in the Austro-Hungarian part of Serbia. The first military governor was General Johan Graf von Salis-Seewis, a Croat by ethnicity with experience of fighting insurgents in Macedonia in the first decade of the century as part of a Great Powers force; his civilian counterpart was Ludwig Thallóczy, a Hungarian with an interest in Bosnian and Albanian history. Each was a nominee of a different faction within the Austro-Hungarian Empire; appointed by Conrad, Salis-Seewis immediately began implementation of policies that would lead to annexation, whereas in keeping with the instructions he had received from the Hungarian prime minister, Thallóczy opposed such developments.

As the war progressed, Germany increasingly adopted a dominant role in its relationship with the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Desperate to assert their own rights, the officials in Vienna looked on with dismay as Germany commenced its exploitation of resources within the Bulgarian-occupied parts of Serbia. One official wrote to Vienna in late December 1915:

> German higher commands are carrying out ruthless economic acts in Serbia. They exploit the country's resources without any consideration for the needs of the people or their future, and do so almost exclusively to meet German requirements. They requisition huge amounts of livestock, wheat, flour, wine, salt and fuel. They have even improvised slaughterhouses for pigs and send their output to Germany. Not only has hunger raised its head here, but the population has also been severely impoverished.[28]

A message was sent to Berlin via Falkenhayn's *OHL* to remind the Germans that Serbia was part of the Austro-Hungarian sphere of influence; the response from Falkenhayn was typically terse, to the effect that Vienna might regard the parts of Serbia that it controlled as being in its sphere of influence, but it had no right to assert control over those parts that were under Bulgarian control, i.e. the mines and agricultural regions being exploited by Germany. This exploitation began even before Serbia had been comprehensively beaten; Hans von Seeckt, Mackensen's chief of staff, complained in October 1915 that a constant bombardment of questions about minerals and wheat from would-be German investors and exploiters left him feeling more like a merchant than an officer.[29]

Despite constant requests from Vienna for a definitive agreement on resource sharing in Serbia, the Germans delayed discussions and spent the intervening weeks strengthening their relationship with Bulgaria in order to put themselves in a better position for whatever negotiations might ensue. It took until 17 August 1916 to reach full agreement. Inevitably, the deal was greatly favourable to Germany, not least because German institutions controlled so many assets in Bulgaria.[30]

As soon as the fighting men had moved on, occupation authorities began their work. Bulgaria intended that the territory it gained from Serbia would become completely Bulgarian in character. Accordingly, all schools in the Bulgarian zone were required to teach exclusively in Bulgarian, and thousands of Serbian males were arrested in an attempt to reduce the risk of resistance. Officially, they were interned, but the reality was rather different, as an Austro-Hungarian officer reported:

> It is known that most of the Serbian intelligentsia, i.e. administrators, teachers, clergy and others, withdrew with the remnants of the Serbian Army, but some have gradually begun to return for personal or material reasons. Here, in occupied territory, it is virtually impossible to find either them or those who did not flee; they have 'gone to Sofia' as the new Bulgarian saying goes. These men are handed over to Bulgarian patrols as suspects without any due legal process, with orders that they should be 'taken to Sofia'. The patrols actually return the following day without them. Whether they are taken 20 or 200km [12 or 120 miles] it is all the same. The patrols take up shovels, disappear into the mountains, and soon return without the prisoners. Bulgarian officers do not even try to conceal the executions, but boast about them.[31]

Whilst such killings were shocking, even to the Austro-Hungarian officer who reported them, they were not unusual for the region. After Serbia seized territory from the Turks during the First Balkan War, Serbian irregulars had carried out many such killings, not stopping with the intelligentsia.[32] During the invasions of 1914, the *k.u.k.* Army had also committed many atrocities, and after the 1915 invasion there was widespread internment in the area under Austro-Hungarian control, though fewer killings than in 1914. Nevertheless, there were summary executions at the hands of the Austro-Hungarian authorities with little or no legal process. Many of those interned became ill or died as a result of poor housing and inadequate food, and those who were not actually ill were frequently used as forced labour. As was the case in the Bulgarian zone of occupation, schools used the language of the occupiers.

Such policies, designed to crush Serbian national consciousness, had severe effects on productivity in a land already badly scarred by war. Agricultural production plummeted due to the absence of so many men from the countryside; in an attempt to make the conquered land more productive, both Bulgarian and Austro-Hungarian authorities resorted to harsher measures, and inevitably these merely resulted in further resentment and even lower production.

The armies that held the occupied territories from the Baltic to the Adriatic, and who continued to face each other grimly determined to continue the slaughter, had changed greatly during 1915. On paper at least, the balance of power had tilted strongly against the Central Powers; the advent of Italy on the side of the Entente Powers meant that by the end of 1915, Germany and Austria-Hungary, together with the small army of Bulgaria, could field approximately 289 divisions, compared to 356 British, Belgian, French, Italian and Russian divisions.[33] This was not a decisive advantage for the Allies, particularly in a war in which mere numerical superiority was no guarantee of military success. However, the Entente Powers were making good progress in other fields. Throughout 1914 and 1915, the Russian Army was hamstrung by shortages of artillery ammunition, but by the end of the year Russian industry was able to produce 50,000 rounds per day, compared to initial wartime production of less than 13,000. Combined with the huge amounts of war *matériel* flowing across the Atlantic to help equip the new divisions raised in Britain, it was likely that pressure upon the Central Powers would be heavy. To make matters worse, it was increasingly unlikely that Germany would be able to take advantage of the disjointed approach adopted by its enemies in 1915, when it had been possible to transfer sufficient forces to the east to inflict serious defeats on Russia and Serbia, and then to bring those troops west to block the autumn offensives launched by the British and French. The plans agreed at the Chantilly conference in December 1915 would see the Entente Powers coordinating their plans for 1916 in order to bring pressure to bear upon Germany and Austria-Hungary simultaneously. The increased provision of ammunition and artillery would eliminate one of the main factors that had held back the Entente armies on all fronts, and it was expected that this would force a breach in the line at some point. The difficulties of forcing a breakthrough were clearly understood, particularly in the west where the Germans had constructed extensive defences in depth. In order to improve the chances of success, the Chantilly conference agreed to attempt to inflict 200,000 casualties on the Central Powers every month; once this attrition rate had worn down the enemy, a massed coordinated offensive would be launched.[34]

It is a sign of how far all nations had come that such cold-blooded calculations of slaughter could be considered in this manner: the killing or wounding of the equivalent of the entire population of a city the size of Bordeaux on a monthly basis was now merely an arithmetical calculation. The bulk of this attrition, the Entente Powers hoped and expected, would be borne by the German Army, as this was clearly by far the strongest of the forces of the Central Powers. By the second Christmas of the war, Germany had over 6.7 million men under arms, far more than at any earlier date. However, the heavy losses of 1914 and 1915 had left their mark. The professional core of the army was smaller than it had ever been, with a large proportion made up of men who had been drafted since the war began. One consequence was that – unlike the army of 1914 – a large part of the army's officer corps was made up of men from the urban middle classes, rather than the traditional German *Junker* families that had historically provided the majority of the kaiser's officers. Such a change was inevitable in the face of losses: by the end of 1915, Germany had lost one sixth of its officers, with an even greater number wounded. This change was not the egalitarian improvement that might have been expected. The new officers were less likely than their aristocratic predecessors to regard the importance of looking after the needs of their troops as such a high priority, and the troops themselves were less tolerant of differences in the treatment of officers and men when the officers were from a closer socio-economic background. The loss of so many highly trained officers, and a significant number of the vital NCOs who held together every unit in the army, inevitably had an impact on the fighting power of Germany's divisions. About 30 per cent of the rank and file of the army in 1914 was made up of men in their early 20s, with another 33 per cent consisting of men aged between 25 and 30; by 1916, the percentage of men aged 20–25 was broadly the same, but the 25–30 group was now reduced to only 20 per cent. There had been a proportionate increase in those aged under 20 and over 35, and this new army was consequently less able to endure the physical hardships of war.[35] To an extent, the importance of this was reduced by static warfare, but the resilience of the 1916 army in the face of prolonged combat was lower than in previous years.

If the German Army had suffered serious losses, those of the *k.u.k.* Army were almost catastrophic. The disastrous defeats in Galicia and Serbia in 1914 had cost the army a large proportion of its trained core, and Conrad's blind determination to force a way through the Carpathian passes in the first winter of the war had brought the army close to collapse. In a desperate attempt to compensate, the conscription age was widened and training shortened, but the consequence of this was that many of those who arrived at the front were physically unfit for service on what was still a relatively mobile battlefield, and their poor training resulted in crippling losses; the only practical way of using what amounted to little more than a militia in the offensive operations demanded by Conrad was to launch mass attacks with little attempt at fire and manoeuvre. Some senior officers like Alfred Krauss, chief of staff of the headquarters of Southwest Front in the Alps, doubted the loyalty of some officers who joined the army during the war:

> The men everywhere were outstanding – even the Czechs who had such a poor reputation – if they were led well, and if officers were present. However, where those who were not loyal to the state were in command as reserve officers, or where active officers became tainted by national sentiment, the result had the worst consequences for the war.[36]

Whilst this may have been the case on some occasions, a far bigger influence was the loss of ethnic structure within the army. In 1914, divisions had tended to have troops of the same nationality, and although German was regarded as the universal language for military functions, it was normal for officers in the army to speak the same language as that of their men. Replacement drafts, or march battalions, were intended to be raised from the same nationalities and then incorporated into the parent front line divisions, but increasingly it became normal practice for trains carrying several march battalions to arrive at the front in the middle of a crisis, and for the battalions to be amalgamated into an ad-hoc unit to deal with the current emergency, with the result that soldiers with only six to eight weeks' training found themselves fighting alongside others who spoke a different language. The new officers that were recruited during the war had little time or inclination to learn any of the languages spoken by their men, and the gulf between the ranks created increasing tensions. In an attempt to keep the polyglot army united, the authorities made the most of one of the few common factors amongst the many nationalities represented: their Roman Catholicism. The *k.u.k.* Army had twenty-four chaplains per division, compared with only six in the German Army.

Some nationalities within the *k.u.k.* Army gave more cause for concern than others. Many Czech units fought with great distinction, but others showed a worrying tendency to desert or surrender at the first sign of Russian pressure. There were similar concerns about Ruthenian troops from eastern Galicia. Within the Czech lands of the empire, there had always been considerable resentment about Austro-Hungarian rule, with some wishing for a similar status to that of Hungary and others advocating complete independence. By mid-1915, there were widespread and open expressions of dissent in Prague and other cities and large towns in Bohemia; heavy-handed attempts to repress many of these merely increased the level of dissent.

Despite its catastrophic losses, the *k.u.k.* Army remained a powerful force at the end of 1915. Its participation in the Eastern Front victories of 1915, albeit as a junior partner of the German Army, had restored some of its self-belief, though the disastrous assault on Rovno in the autumn had shown once more that it struggled to mount any offensive operation without the help – or leadership – of its partner. Nevertheless, its high command, headed by Conrad, remained convinced that the war could be won through an offensive operation. Now that the Russians had been pushed back, Conrad turned his attention on the enemy that he most disliked: Italy. Once the winter was over, 1916 would see the *k.u.k.* Army try once more to turn its chief's dreams of a successful offensive operation into reality.

The relationship between the Germans and their Austro-Hungarian allies was a strange one, based more on necessity than anything else. Despite the common language between Germany and the Austrian part of the Dual Monarchy, the attitudes and aspirations of the two nations were very different. Ludendorff described how a Jewish resident of a town in Poland asked why Germany had chosen to shackle itself to a corpse, a view that gained widespread support throughout the German military as the war continued.[37] Karl Kraus' *Die Letzten Tage der Menschheit* described the alliance as being akin to one between Eskimos and Congolese natives.[38] Whilst German accounts written after the war have been highly critical of the performance of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the reality is that the Germans were also guilty of failing to ensure proper coordination between the two powers. Partly as a result of pre-war spy scandals, the German military establishment showed little inclination to trust their Austro-Hungarian counterparts, and there was little understanding in each camp of the capabilities and limitations of the other until fighting began. Conrad had expected Moltke to win a swift victory in the west within forty days, and Moltke had encouraged Conrad to believe that German forces would be available for a joint offensive against Russia early in the war; both of these, particularly the latter, were utterly unrealistic. Conrad repeatedly stated that he had been promised such an attack in the east in 1909 and that promise had never been withdrawn, but even the most superficial understanding of German strategy and intentions would have shown that such an offensive was impossible, and the 'promises' of German cooperation in an offensive were largely due to Conrad's over-optimistic interpretation of German messages about their intentions. Attempts to agree a united command in the east foundered on issues of national pride; in the early months of the war, the *k.u.k.* Army had far more troops on the Eastern Front than the Germans, and it was the latter who opposed a unified command, which – given the relative troop strengths – would have been Austro-Hungarian. As German troops grew to form a larger proportion of Central Power forces facing Russia, the roles were reversed, with Vienna repeatedly opposing German attempts to assume control in the east. By the end of 1915, the relationship between the two allies was marked by contempt on the part of the Germans, and resentment on the part of the Austro-Hungarian establishment.[39] Austro-Hungarian officials regarded the Prussians who dominated the German military as cold, aloof and arrogant, often preferring to do business with Bavarian officers (who were also fellow Catholics); the Germans watched with incredulous horror as their Austro-Hungarian counterparts simply shrugged at their army's inadequacies as if nothing better could be expected. The consequence was that at the very moment that their enemies were beginning to show proper strategic cohesion, the German *OHL* and the Austro-Hungarian *AOK* were drawing up their plans without any regard for the other's intentions.

The Russian Army had endured a terrible year in 1915. At the beginning, it had seemed poised to descend from the Carpathian passes onto the Hungarian plain, and there were plans for another invasion of East Prussia. As the year progressed, it had suffered terrible losses in the winter battles both in the north, to the east of the Masurian Lakes, and in the south, where both the Russian and Austro-Hungarian forces struggled to assert their will in impossible mountainous terrain in the middle of winter. When Mackensen opened his offensive, it was still badly weakened by its Carpathian ordeal, and suffered further disastrous losses as its commanders were urged to mount a hopeless defence in the face of German artillery superiority. Eventually, the leadership had bowed to reality and authorised a general retreat that saw Russia concede not only its share of Poland, but also much of the Baltic region south of Riga, parts of Belarus, and most of eastern Galicia. It was only at the end of the year that a degree of pride and confidence had returned in a series of bloody battles with predominantly Austro-Hungarian forces to the west of Rovno.

The great retreat of July and August 1915 was accompanied by a sight rarely seen in previous wars: the movement of masses of refugees. Vasily Gurko, a cavalry officer who had taken part in the first Russian invasion of East Prussia in 1914, commented on the suffering of ordinary people caught up in the great events of the moment:

> Up to these times such a thing had never been known in the histories of war between civilised nations. The reason for this is probably that in previous wars the forces used were not large enough to enable them to make an advance with a front extending right across the whole of the enemy territory, and that consequently it was not the whole of the population that was affected by such an invasion. Possibly part of the population never saw the enemy's troops. It is a different matter in this war, when the enemy invades in a compact wave sweeping everything before him in his passage.
>
> … Whilst the retreat of our troops was taking place through the governments of the Kingdom of Poland, the flight of the local inhabitants had not as yet taken on the form of unreasonable panic, but as the retreat progressed deeper into the country the numbers of the population on the move increased more and more. It was specially intense where the people were frightened from their homes by the development of battles. There they hurriedly loaded their household goods, children and old people, on to carts, and having collected the small and large cattle, joined the unbroken, ceaseless current of people moving from west to east. The rains naturally compelled them to take advantage of the few macadamised roads, in consequence of which these highways were quickly overflowing with the numbers, and progress was difficult … Amongst the refugees appeared disease and a considerable mortality. The whole route of this exodus was marked by small hillocks with hastily erected crosses over them. For such an occurrence neither the public organisations of the Zemstvo [Russian local government], town councils, Red Cross, nor the government administration were prepared. Hurriedly they all began taking measures to bring this movement into some degree of order.
>
> … Only those who have actually seen the flight of the Russian population can in any way conceive the horrors which attended it … men who had fought in several wars and many bloody battles told me no horrors of a field of battle … can be compared to the awful spectacle of this ceaseless exodus of a population knowing neither the object of the movement, nor a place where they might find rest, food and housing.[40]

The restoration of order was a difficult and haphazard process. The few hard roads were vital for military movements, and the railways lacked the capacity to move essential supplies for the army, let alone to help evacuate civilians. Eventually, through a mixture of improvisation and stoic endurance, shelter was found for those who had fled. Many, overtaken by the German advance, grimly made their way back to their villages and towns to endure life as best they could under occupation. Others eventually made their way to the great cities of the Russian Empire – Petrograd, Moscow and Kiev – and added to the overcrowded population already living there, placing still further strains on the inadequate Russian food supply network.

The most significant changes in the Russian Army related to its high command. From the very start of the war, *Stavka* – the supreme headquarters of the army – had failed to impose its will upon the forces in the field. Lines of communication from the Russian interior to the west naturally divided into two at the barrier of the Pripet Marshes in central western Russia, and the Russian Army on mobilisation was therefore divided into two fronts, with Northwest Front facing Germany north of the marshes and Southwest Front facing the Austro-Hungarian Empire to the south. Although *Stavka* was responsible for coordinating the two fronts, the reality was that each front acted almost independently of the other, refusing to cooperate on issues of supplies and troop transfers. The supreme commander of the army in 1914 was Grand Duke Nikolai, who proved to be completely ineffectual in settling disputes between the front commanders. In his defence, it should be said that he inherited an army that was operating according to pre-war plans that he had had no part in drawing up, and the command arrangements of the army – designed by the former war minister, Vladimir Sukhomlinov – had been deliberately designed to prevent a powerful figure rising up in the army and thus being in a position to challenge Sukhomlinov himself. However, by the summer of 1915 it was impossible for Nikolai to remain in post, with Russian armies suffering defeat after defeat in the face of Mackensen's advance.

In August 1914, Nikolai had been the favourite choice for almost everyone as supreme commander, not least because there was no realistic alternative. To a very large extent, this was still true the following summer: none of Russia's senior officers had enjoyed sufficient consistent success to be an automatic choice, though some, such as Alexei Alexeyevich Brusilov and Mikhail Vasiliyevich Alexeyev, had done markedly better than others. However, the news that the new commander-in-chief was to be Tsar Nicholas himself had come as an almost universal shock. He had very little military experience, and there were many who thought that it was a singularly inopportune moment for him to take command, with Russia's armies in near-universal retreat and little prospect of matters improving in the immediate future, as Yuri Danilov, who was coming to the end of his spell as quartermaster-general of the Russian Army, later wrote:

> I will not examine in detail the reasons that persuaded Tsar Nicholas II to assume command of the active army in the situation that prevailed. These reasons are of too complex an order and can only be considered with great caution. At the time, I was convinced that the principal reason was the sovereign's mystic belief in his own abilities, his tendency to dwell on the great history of Russia, which had perhaps been presented to him in a false light; although certain human weaknesses may have played a role. But what I do not understand at all is how persons in his entourage, those in his confidence, could have sought deliberately to strengthen his conviction of the necessity and the opportunity to pursue this idea instead of dissuading him. How blind were they; could they not see the grave events that were developing and did they not understand that they risked compromising the already shaky authority of the head of state?[41]

The change of senior commander triggered alterations elsewhere. Alexeyev, who had started the war as chief of staff of Southwest Front and had then taken command of Northwest Front, became the tsar's chief of staff.

During 1915, there was considerable civilian unrest in Russia as a consequence of the conduct of the war, both in the countryside and the cities. Letters from the front painted a grim picture. One described how reinforcements routinely arrived without weapons, ammunition or even adequate winter clothing, and were expected to acquire it from other soldiers who died or were wounded. In others, the Germans were repeatedly described as invincible, equipped with everything that the Russians lacked – artillery, rifles, ammunition, adequate training, good morale, and good leadership. Some letters openly challenged the royal family – 'If the tsar thinks it's necessary to fight, let him do the fighting himself.'[42] Although reports from authorities painted lurid pictures of disquiet verging on the edge of open revolt, most unrest stopped far short of that in the rural areas. Inflation and food shortages in the cities resulted in strikes that cost over a million working days between April and September 1915; here, unlike in the countryside, there was violence, for example in June when police opened fire on protesting strikers in Kostroma, a town on the Volga to the northeast of Moscow. Thirty workers were killed and many wounded, leading to further strikes in Petrograd, Moscow and elsewhere.[43]

Despite repeated calls for a government of national confidence, large parts of Russian political society were kept at arm's length. Alexander Ivanovich Guchkov, the leader of the liberal Octobrist Movement and a long-time campaigner for the Duma (the Russian state parliament) having a greater say in matters such as the running of the army, found himself caught between critics from the left wing of Russian politics and the state institutions that he was trying to defend. He wished to create a reformed Russia with the tsar as a constitutional monarch, but the hostility of his party to Rasputin earned him Tsarina Alexandra's undying enmity. In letters to Tsar Nicholas in September 1915, she wrote:

> Oh, could one not hang Guchkov? … A strong railway accident in which he alone would suffer would be a real punishment from God and well deserved.[44]

At a time when dissatisfaction with the autocratic Russian government was becoming ever harder to contain, it was the tragedy of the Romanov dynasty that its head was such a poor judge of character, and was so strongly influenced by his immediate entourage, particularly his wife Alexandra. Her social awkwardness and shyness had been misinterpreted as aloof contempt, leading to unpopularity, and she retreated in the face of hostility into her own inner circle, the most important of which was Grigory Yefimovich Rasputin, the self-styled holy man who had become a close confidant of the tsar and tsarina. The almost universal hostility towards Rasputin amongst the political and military establishment further worsened relations between Alexandra and almost everyone else, apart from the small clique of opportunists who saw Rasputin's influence on the imperial family as a means of personal advancement.

Pressure upon the tsar to recall the Duma became irresistible, leading to the first full session since the start of hostilities, opening on the anniversary of the start of the war. In an often ill-tempered session, representatives of all factions within Russia's political spectrum argued about how best to proceed, and ultimately the majority of those present formed themselves into the Progressive Bloc. This was held together by little more than a sense of anger at the conduct of the war to date, and the refusal of the tsar to consider any political reforms. The government ministers generally disliked the Russian prime minister, Ivan Logginovich Goremykin, feeling that his personal inflexible loyalty to the tsar was a substantial block in the path of any reforms that might ease the pressure from the Progressive Bloc, but the tsar and his wife continued to support 'dear old Goremykin', as Alexandra called him.[45]

Even a personal appearance by the tsar to reprimand his ministers for disloyalty failed to stifle dissent; Nicholas' next step was to remove some of the more outspoken ministers and to replace them with more pliant individuals.

One such was Alexei Nikolayevich Khvostov, who became minister of the interior. He was an experienced manipulator of authority for personal gain, and he used a variety of methods ranging from brutal suppression to the demonisation of Russia's Jews and ethnic Germans to divert attention from the clear failings of the government. The combination of the winter and the successful fighting against the Black-Yellow Offensive – the Austro-Hungarian attempts to take Rovno in the autumn of 1915 – calmed matters considerably, and in January 1916 Nicholas felt able to allow the elderly Goremykin to step down. Had he been replaced by a suitable compromise candidate, much of the opposition of the Progressive Bloc could have been undermined, but true to his previous form, the tsar chose a singularly unsuitable person: Boris Vladimirovich Stürmer, another of the circle of self-serving flatterers that surrounded the Romanov throne. Maurice Paléologue, the French ambassador, had no doubts about his character:

> He is 67 and worse than a mediocrity – third-rate intellect, mean spirit, low character, doubtful honesty, no experience, and no idea of state business. The most that can be said is that he has a rather pretty talent for cunning and flattery.
>
> … Neither his personal qualifications nor his administrative record and social position marked him out as fitted for the high office which has just been entrusted to him, to the astonishment of everyone. But his appointment becomes intelligible on the supposition that he has been selected solely as a tool; in other words, actually on account of his insignificance and servility. This choice has been inspired by the Empress' *camarilla*, and warmly recommended to the Emperor by Rasputin, with whom Stürmer is on the most intimate terms.[46]

As Stürmer replaced the adherents of Goremykin with his own favourites, dissent grew again in political circles. In the countryside, this was enhanced by growing food shortages, at least partly due to the absence of so many men at the front. In the cities, swollen by refugees from western Russia and the additional workers required for the armaments industries, the food shortages were even worse than in rural Russia, and the dissatisfaction of the previous year surfaced again. As commander-in-chief, Tsar Nicholas found himself the subject of widespread criticism. The riskiness of putting himself in such a role was now plain for all to see.

In the aftermath of the Great Retreat of 1915, the two fronts of the Russian Army were reorganised into three bodies, with Nikolai Iudevich Ivanov retaining control of Southwest Front. Northwest Front, which had grown in size as the dislocated fragments of the Russian Army were driven back, was divided in two.

Nikolai Vladimirovich Ruzsky, who managed to retain favour in high circles despite his deep-seated caution that sometimes bordered on fatal indecision, took command of Northern Front, while between this command and Ivanov to the south was a new West Front,* initially under Alexeyev's command. When Alexeyev moved to take up his post at *Stavka*, he was replaced by Alexei Ermolayevich Evert, who had commanded armies in the field since the beginning of the war – whilst he was not regarded with any great distinction, neither had he made any serious mistakes. However, it remained to be seen whether he would be able to show the same level of skill commanding an army group as he had when commanding a field army.

Alexeyev's predecessor as chief of the general staff was Nikolai Yanushkevich, widely dismissed by his contemporaries as someone who was more a courtier and flatterer than a serious senior officer, though he was almost alone in the Russian high command in regarding logistics as an important matter.[47] Although Alexeyev had performed competently, particularly as commander of Northwest Front, there were reservations about his new role, particularly as the inexperienced tsar would be almost completely dependent on his judgement. He would therefore be operating in many respects as the true supreme commander of Russia's armies, as Brusilov later wrote:

> He possessed a good mind with great military knowledge, was quick of thought and certainly a good strategist. I believe that he would have been perfect as chief of the general staff, but as a supreme leader he constantly wavered, and was totally unsuitable because he did not have a strong and determined will.[48]

Alfred Knox, the British military attaché in Russia, made his own observations of Alexeyev:

> Alexeyev's faults were that he tried to do everything himself and that he lacked the necessary self-reliance to enable him to take decisions quickly. An officer who served under him, in conversation, compared him to a 'second Kuropatkin [Russian war minister during the disastrous Russo-Japanese War], who could decide nothing.' Another officer – an army commander – told me that at the commencement of the war there was quite a dispute in the staff of Southwest Front as to who should open official telegrams – the commander-in-chief, Ivanov,

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* This new group is usually referred to as 'Western Front', but throughout this work is called 'West Front' in order to distinguish it from the front in Belgium and France.

> or his chief of staff, Alexeyev. 'The matter was at length settled by typing two copies, one of which Ivanov tore open and the other Alexeyev. But matters then became worse, for each pencilled his instructions on the messages, and the staff did not know where the devil they were.'
>
> At *Stavka* Alexeyev did not show much power in delegating work. He still looked out places on the map himself. It was said that when things went badly he used to go into his bedroom to pray while his subordinates awaited decisions.[49]

Part of the problem faced by Alexeyev was that Grand Duke Nikolai had very effectively courted western officials and had secured their personal admiration and support. Some of Alexeyev's personal circle were suspicious of the intentions of the Western Allies, and made little attempt to hide their thoughts; inevitably, this led French and British diplomats and attachés to question the suitability of Alexeyev as chief of staff for a new commander-in-chief who, due to his lack of military knowledge, would inevitably defer to his professional adviser. Alexeyev lacked both the personal skills and the time to build good relationships with western figures; he had his hands full rebuilding his broken armies.

By the end of 1915, all of the Great Powers were beginning to show signs of strain from the war. There were increasing food shortages throughout the Central Powers, and ethnic unrest was beginning to surface in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Within Russia, the cracks were far wider. There was a growing rift amongst Russian industrialists, broadly grouped into those centred on Petrograd and those in Moscow. The latter group felt that government contracts were being awarded predominantly to businesses around the capital and that Moscow's resources were not being used properly. Smaller businesses elsewhere in the Russian Empire joined the anti-Petrograd group and demanded their share of contracts, not least because Petrograd industrialists were seen to be enriching themselves enormously.[50] Nevertheless, the shortages of ammunition, guns and rifles that had played such a major part in Russian problems throughout 1915 appeared to be under control by the end of the year. At the beginning of the war, the Russian armies that attempted to invade East Prussia did so with fewer than 300 rounds of ammunition per artillery piece, but as the second winter of the war began, it was possible to stockpile 1,000 rounds per gun. In a similar manner, the large numbers of men who were sent to the front without rifles diminished steadily. After over a year of fighting and heavy losses, the Russian Army was finally receiving equipment on a scale commensurate with the tasks that it faced. However, some observers like Knox remained doubtful about its true effectiveness:

> The number of officers of every kind in the normal division of 16 battalions and six batteries had fallen to an average of 110. Few infantry units still retained more than 12–20% of their original establishment of professional officers …
>
> The morale of the army had come through a severe trial, and one that would have been fatal to most armies. It said there was no good in their fighting, as they were always beaten.[51]

Traditionally, Russia's allies and enemies had regarded the huge manpower resources, combined with the scale of the landscape, as rendering Russia almost unbeatable in war. Although both of these factors remained important, the war had already shown that the days of winning battles simply by having overwhelming strength in numbers were over; well-organised defences could crush attacks almost regardless of the number of attackers. If the Russian advantage in manpower was to be effective, it had to manifest itself in the form of trained, effective personnel. By the end of 1915, it was clear that there were major problems with this, and the roots dated back to long before the beginning of hostilities.

As Russia's population grew in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the number of men available for national service also grew, but the authorities were reluctant to commit to the levels of expenditure required to train, feed and equip such huge numbers. Accordingly, a complex system of exemptions developed – men could request release from conscription on the grounds that they had fathers, grandfathers or uncles who had died in the army, or who already had a close relative serving. Those who were the only sons of families could also claim exemption, as could men who claimed to be the sole breadwinners of their families; it is difficult to think of any head of a family of the era to whom this last exemption did not apply. These men were spared the rigours – but also the training – of full conscription, receiving only the most rudimentary teaching about military activity. They were placed in a special reserve category of the *Opolchenie* ('home guard' or local militia), and were guaranteed in law that they would not see front line service; the worst they could expect in wartime was to serve as guards of important installations in order to release regular soldiers for the front.

An additional problem was that compared with the men who served in the ranks of Russia's western allies and the Central Powers, Russian soldiers came from a poorer background. Many had disabilities before they joined the army, and others fell victim to illness or injury shortly after, while they were technically available as reservists. Whilst this was also true of soldiers in nations elsewhere in Europe – the men drafted into armies from the industrial centres of Germany, France and Britain were all frequently noted to be in poor health – the Russians appear to have been in the worst state of all. Within ten years of leaving the army, it was estimated that 40 per cent of Russian soldiers were either dead or physically incapable of service, a far higher percentage than seen anywhere else in Europe.[52]

After the catastrophic losses of the first half of 1915, Russia desperately needed manpower for its depleted armies, and had to turn to the *Opolchenie*. A law was passed in late summer authorising their deployment in the front line, contrary to all previous assurances, leading to widespread unrest. Letters from the front, and invalided men returning home, had spread tales of the shortage of weapons and ammunition at the front, and many protested that they would defy the authorities even if it led to their deaths – 'Better that we should die here than be sent to war without bullets!'[53] Many simply refused to attend when summoned for service, while others deserted at every opportunity. One contingent of 800 men was dispatched to barracks near Moscow; only 372 of them actually completed the journey.[54] They proved to be difficult recruits, bringing with them a deep sense of hostility and betrayal. Slowly, they were turned into capable soldiers, but they carried with them the resentment of being in a war that they had not expected to fight. They would prove to be brittle – it would not take much by way of setback for their morale to collapse.

Despite the improving performance of industries supporting the army, there were growing signs of the social strains that the war had brought to Russia. To an extent, these stresses had existed before the war, but the pressures of the conflict now accelerated their spread. The growing dislike of Tsarina Alexandra, whom Nicholas had appointed as regent during his absence and who was seen to be too much under the influence of Rasputin, the endless bad news from the front line with appalling losses, and resentment at the manner in which many industrial magnates enriched themselves while hundreds of thousands fought and died in the front line, or suffered increasing food shortages throughout Russia, were all factors. Knox wrote:

> More than one officer assured me in September 1915 that there would certainly be a revolution if the enemy approached Petrograd. They said that such a movement at such a time would be deplorable, but that the government was bringing it upon itself, and though the Guard might remain loyal, the officers of the line would lend no hand in its suppression.
>
> On 19 September I reported: If there has ever been a government that richly deserved a revolution, it is the present one in Russia. If it escapes it will only be because the members of the Duma are too patriotic to agitate in this time of crisis.

> … The mistrust of authority was penetrating all classes of society. I heard of one village near Luga where cheap papers were received describing mythical victories, and the poor people went in procession to beg the priest to celebrate a service of thanksgiving, learning only some days later from a more reliable paper that the whole report was a fabrication. This village had lost 24 men killed out of 26 called up. The whole of its population, old men, women and children, were now convinced that Russia had been sold to her enemies by the Ministry …
>
> There was much corruption. Officials of the Department of Military Justice worked hard at the preparation of charges against many highly placed individuals, but no one was ever publicly disgraced by exemplary punishment. Such people were indeed never punished in Russia as they ought to have been.[55]

At the end of 1915, Knox accompanied a Russian delegation that travelled to London and Paris for discussions about supply of armaments to Russia. During the visit, Knox had meetings with senior British figures. Lieutenant General Sir William Robertson, chief of staff of the British Expeditionary Force and about to become Chief of the Imperial Defence Staff, criticised Knox for the pessimism of his dispatches from Russia, something that Knox rejected. By contrast, Lieutenant General Sir Henry Wilson, the principal British liaison officer between the British and French staffs, advised Knox that a breakthrough in the west would be impossible unless Russia was able to put sufficient pressure upon Germany to force the redeployment of thirty divisions, and asked whether it was possible for Russia to mount the sort of attack that would make this happen. Knox's reflections summarise the issues neatly:

> This type of question made me think that the pessimism of my dispatches, at which people laughed, had not been deep enough. Competent authorities in the west seemed to expect from Russia a continued effort based on the size of her population, without taking into consideration the limitations imposed by the actual conditions of armament, communications and power of organisation.[56]

Regardless of Knox's personal views on unrealistic expectations in the west about Russia's abilities, the grand strategy agreed by the Entente Powers at Chantilly necessitated coordinated pressure on the Central Powers. Russian industry was finally producing weapons and ammunition in sufficient quantities for the war, and the rail line running south from Archangelsk was being modernised to accelerate the rate at which supplies could be brought into Russia from France, Britain and elsewhere. Whilst there was widespread unrest and unhappiness about the conduct of the war, Russia remained united – for the moment. But it was clearly an increasingly fragile unity, and would only survive if the war turned decisively in Russia's favour in 1916. If this was to happen, the Russian Army would have to achieve sustained victories against both the foes that it faced. There was no question that the army could defeat the Austro-Hungarian forces – it had done so on several occasions – but there would also have to be victory against the feared German Army. It remained to be seen whether the tsar's forces would be capable of delivering the sort of blow that Wilson and others regarded as essential if the war was to be brought to a satisfactory conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

THE WINTER BATTLES

Falkenhayn had repeatedly made clear his view that operations on the Eastern Front in 1915 should continue only until Russia had been weakened sufficiently to allow a major diversion of forces to other fronts, and he had serious misgivings about the predominantly Austro-Hungarian attacks in Volhynia in the autumn. Hoping that the *k.u.k.* Army would be able to inflict one more defeat on Russia before the winter and would thus recover its self-confidence, he agreed to the campaign that became known as the 'Black-Yellow Offensive', and then watched with dismay as it unfolded disastrously during September 1915. Eventually, German forces from the central sector of the Eastern Front had to move south to help, and Conrad was forced to reduce the Austro-Hungarian commitment to the invasion of Serbia. The outcome of what had been intended as an operation to outflank the northern flank of Ivanov's Southwest Front culminating in the capture of Rovno was a series of advances and retreats that left the German and Austro-Hungarian forces involved with an additional 231,000 casualties.[57] A worryingly high proportion of these were men who were listed as 'missing' – most of these were prisoners. Far from restoring morale and self-confidence in the *k.u.k.* Army, the Volhynia campaign showed once more that it remained a fragile force.

Despite this setback, Falkenhayn enquired whether it might be possible for the *k.u.k.* Army to mount an attack into eastern Galicia to coincide with the invasion of Serbia. If this attack were successful, it would position Austro-Hungarian forces close to Romania, potentially acting as a deterrent against any Romanian move against Bulgaria once the fighting in Serbia began. Normally an enthusiast for offensive operations, Conrad had to decline:

> The resumption of the offensive in Volhynia and East Galicia can only be considered

> after extensive restoration of troop strengths, which were severely degraded in the September fighting, and therefore not until the second half of October.[58]

Falkenhayn was aware that the Russians too would be able to reinforce their lines by such a date, and the proposed assault was therefore most unlikely to succeed. With plans for further advances thus abandoned, the troops began to build defensive positions that were intended to fix the front line for the foreseeable future. The preparations proved to be timely. The mood of gloom that had dominated the Russian military establishment for much of the year was beginning to lift. Ammunition was finally arriving at the front in quantities that approached an acceptable level, and the supply of rifles was now sufficient to ensure that there were no longer thousands of men in front line units who were unable to be used because they were unarmed. The German advance in central Russia had come to a halt for a variety of reasons: the Germans could see little point in advancing into the vastness of Belarus and Russia; supply lines had reached the stage where it was impossible to sustain operations without a prolonged pause; and the diversion of German forces to Serbia and the Western Front resulted in a tilt in the balance of power in favour of the battered Russian forces. Given the weakness of Austro-Hungarian forces in the face of Russian attacks, many now urged Ivanov to attack with his Southwest Front.

Ivanov had serious reservations. Just a few months before, he had confidently predicted that his troops were about to force their way through the Carpathian Mountains onto the Hungarian plain. Once Budapest was occupied, Hungary would sue for peace, effectively destroying the Austro-Hungarian Empire and leaving Germany isolated. Instead, he had been forced to watch helplessly as his armies were driven back from one line to the next by Mackensen's seemingly unstoppable advance. Even at this stage, he feared a resumption of German attacks, and it took the intervention of Alexeyev, the chief of staff at *Stavka*, to move things onto a more positive footing. On 29 September, Alexeyev wrote that there was clearly no prospect of a resumption of attacks by the Central Powers other than in the northern part of the long front line, and that Ivanov should prepare for further offensive operations by Brusilov's Eighth Army at the northern end of Southwest Front's sector, in conjunction with attacks by the neighbouring Third Army from Western Front.[59]

Limited Russian attacks began on 2 October, driving back two Austro-Hungarian cavalry divisions and elements of the Polish Legion, a formation recruited by the Austro-Hungarian authorities to serve alongside their own units. For the Central Powers, the entire sector was under the control of General

Alexander von Linsingen, a dour East Prussian whose open disdain for Germany's ally had won him few friends when he had served as commander of the German South Army in the Carpathians earlier in 1915. Now, he simultaneously commanded the German Army of the Bug and *Heeresgruppe Linsingen*, and he reorganised his troops as rapidly as he could. Judging that he would need German rather than Austro-Hungarian troops to restore the situation, he pulled the German 1st Infantry Division out of line, replacing it with the Austro-Hungarian 13th Rifle Division and sending it to Kołki. Here, General Richard von Conta, the commander of the German division, would also take control of the Austro-Hungarian 11th Infantry Division and would strike into the flank of the advancing Russians on 5 October. Aware of the threat, the Russians withdrew, and Conta's force followed at first without opposition before encountering increasing resistance in dense woodland. Confused fighting raged for days, slowly widening as elements of Brusilov's Eighth Army to the south, followed by Dmitri Gregorovich Shcherbachev's Seventh Army even further to the south, joined the attempts to drive back the Austro-Hungarian forces.

All along the sector, crises developed as the exhausted forces of the *k.u.k.* Army struggled to hold back the Russians. Ultimately, the fighting achieved little other than further casualties. The terrain was on the southern edge of the great Pripet Marshes, and the forests and swamps were a constant obstacle to both sides, as was the poor weather. Gradually, the fighting died down again until by mid-October both sides resumed construction of their long-term positions. The front line had barely moved.

The deteriorating weather that brought a pause to the fighting was as big a foe for the troops of both sides in the front line as the enemy. Whenever the temperature rose a little, trenches and bunkers became waterlogged and much of the front line turned into a swamp; sudden chills then froze the ground, making further digging difficult. Nevertheless, construction of 'permanent' positions continued at a slow but steady rate, though not on the same scale as in northern France. But as the weather turned steadily colder, and thoughts turned to how to implement the Chantilly conference's conclusions, the Russians began to prepare for a new attack.

The agreement reached between the Entente partners was twofold: each would attempt to wear down the enemy through attrition, and then in the summer would commit to a coordinated offensive against what was hoped would be weakening resistance. Alexeyev accordingly drew up orders for a new offensive in eastern Galicia aimed at driving the *k.u.k.* Army back to, and ideally out of, Lemberg and Kolomea. This was an ambitious objective, as the battle line now lay some 48 miles (80km) east of Lemberg, and sustaining an advance over this distance in midwinter was surely beyond the abilities of the Russian Army. Nevertheless, an attempt was to be made. Alexeyev reasoned that the Austro-Hungarian forces had proved brittle, and a major setback would greatly damage their ability to continue in the war; even if the cities remained out of reach, the casualties that would be inflicted upon the Austro-Hungarian forces would make future assaults easier. Political considerations were also significant, particularly with regard to Romania.

As a result of a treaty signed in 1883, Romania was obliged to go to war as an ally of the Austro-Hungarian Empire if the latter came under attack, and in 1914 whilst King Carol I was inclined to honour the treaty, his government was strongly pro-Entente. In a similar manner to the Italians, Romanian politicians successfully argued that Romania's treaty obligations could not be invoked as the Dual Monarchy had started the war and was the aggressor. Some parts of Romanian society, particularly the *Partidul Național Liberal* (PNL, or National Liberal Party) led by Ion Brătianu, suggested that Romania should take advantage of the war to attack the Austro-Hungarian Empire in order to seize control of Transylvania, which was at the time under Hungarian control and whose population had a substantial Romanian component, but just as the politicians were able to oppose Carol's desire to fight alongside the Central Powers, Carol was successful in blocking the proposed attack into Transylvania.

King Carol died in October 1914 aged 75; the Austro-Hungarian ambassador, Ottokar Czernin von und zu Chudenitz, felt that the stresses brought about by the tension between his desire to support Germany and the wishes of others to support the Entente created an intolerable burden:

> King Carol's death was caused by the war. The last weeks of his life were a torture to him; each message that I had to deliver he felt as the lash of a whip. I was enjoined to do all I could to secure Romania's prompt cooperation, according to the terms of the alliance, and I was even obliged to go so far as to remind him that 'a promise given allows of no prevarication: that a treaty is a treaty, and his honour obliged him to unsheathe his sword.' I recollect one particularly painful scene, where the King, weeping bitterly, flung himself across his writing-table and with trembling hands tried to wrench from his neck his order *Pour la Mérite*. I can affirm without any exaggeration that I could see him wasting away under the ceaseless moral blows dealt to him, and that the mental torment he went through undoubtedly shortened his life.[60]

His successor was his nephew Ferdinand. Whilst Carol had been strongly pro-German – he was a member of the Hohenzollern family and was married to a

German – Ferdinand was less sympathetic to Germany. Although his marriage to the British Princess Marie was not a happy one, with strong evidence that two of her six children were the result of her affair with Barbu Știrbey, a close political ally of Brătianu, she exerted considerable influence upon the king.[61] It is very likely that she was encouraged to do so by Știrbey in order to further the cause of Brătianu's faction. Almost as soon as he became king, Ferdinand cooperated with Brătianu in communicating with both sides to determine which was prepared to offer Romania the most for its allegiance. Inevitably, Transylvania and parts of Bukovina featured highly in the discussions. Falkenhayn suggested at one point that Vienna should consider making territorial concessions to Bucharest in return for a Romanian alliance, but with similar claims on Austro-Hungarian territory from practically every side, this was not a popular or acceptable proposal. In any event the territory involved was part of the Kingdom of Hungary, and István Tisza, the Hungarian prime minister, flatly rejected any suggestion of conceding land.

In early 1915, it seemed possible that Ivanov would succeed in forcing his way through the Carpathians, and Brătianu renewed his drive for Romania to join in the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire that would follow. The British had not played a major role in negotiations with Romania and the government now dispatched Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Thomson to Bucharest for talks; he rapidly reached the conclusion that far from being an asset, Romania might turn out to be a considerable liability to the Entente, as its forces were far from ready for war and could find themselves facing foes on multiple fronts. This, inevitably, would create an additional drain upon the resources of the Entente. Thomson's assessment was accurate and proved to be true, but Lord Kitchener, who was Secretary of State for War, overruled his reservations and told him to press on with talks. Negotiations were hampered by the fact that the Russians also wished to annex the parts of Austro-Hungarian Bukovina that Romania desired, and by Romanian interest in annexing parts of Serbia. Eventually, the Russian defeats in the face of Mackensen's decisive offensive left Brătianu and others far less certain of an Entente victory, and the possibility of Romanian involvement in the war receded.

In late 1915, Alexeyev and other senior Russian figures believed that a major Austro-Hungarian defeat in Galicia would encourage Romania to commit itself to the Entente. Indeed, the Russian Seventh Army under the command of Dmitri Shcherbachev had been held back from the front line in the hope that the Romanians would enter the war before the end of 1915, in which case this army would deploy rapidly through Romania to threaten a thrust into Serbia, which had been occupied by the Central Powers.

The additional troops that Romania would bring to the war were almost insignificant, but the involvement of Romania would greatly complicate matters for the Central Powers. They would be forced to commit troops to defend an even longer front line, thus creating the weaknesses that the Chantilly conference had concluded were essential for the success of the planned coordinated offensives of the summer. There is little evidence to suggest that the Russians actually had any specific discussions with Romanian officials about whether a Russian attack in Galicia would bring about a change of heart in Bucharest; as was the case in so many Russian decisions made in the First World War, Alexeyev's thinking – and that of most other senior Russian officials involved in considerations about Romania – seems to have been shaped largely by his own assumptions rather than any firm evidence.

The attack was to be launched by Ivanov's Southwest Front. Ivanov had several armies at his disposal. In the very south, along the Dniester, was Ninth Army under the command of Platon Alexeyevich Lechitsky with eleven infantry divisions and a little over three cavalry divisions. North of the Dniester, the battle lines followed the path of the River Strypa, and Lechitsky's neighbour was Shcherbachev's Seventh Army with eight infantry divisions and four cavalry divisions. The front line then passed to the east of Tarnopol, with Eleventh Army under the command of Vladimir Victorovich Sakharov and a further eight infantry divisions, and finally continued north in the sector held by Brusilov's Eighth Army, with twelve infantry divisions and four cavalry divisions. In total, Ivanov had thirty-nine infantry divisions and eleven cavalry divisions, though none of these were remotely close to full strength.

Shcherbachev had commanded the Russian IX Corps at the beginning of the war, playing a role in the crushing defeat inflicted on the Austro-Hungarian forces in the opening weeks of the conflict. He had supervised the siege of the fortress city of Przemyśl and then commanded Eleventh Army until October 1915. Like many senior Russian officers, he was not a young man – he was 63 – but he had led his troops capably, if without flair. This would be the first time that he commanded an army in a major assault. His neighbour, Platon Lechitsky, was only three years younger. He was one of the few Russian officers to emerge from the Russo-Japanese War with his reputation enhanced, and had commanded Ninth Army since its creation in August 1914. Behind these two armies was a new creation, the Guards Army, consisting of both Guards Infantry Corps and the Guards Cavalry Corps, and it was hoped that in the event of a successful breakthrough, this force would be available for exploitation. The choice of commander for the Guards Army showed the Russian military system at its worst. Vladimir Mikhailovich Bezobrazov was a member of a family that had longstanding connections with the imperial court, and he commanded I Guards Infantry Corps at the beginning of the war. Although his military performance was not without some notable successes, he was a prickly personality who often refused to obey instructions; during the Russian retreat in the face of Mackensen's great offensive during the summer of 1915, he had refused to obey an order from the commander of Third Army to retreat in concordance with other formations on the absurd pretext that the Imperial Guard should never retreat. The consequence of this was pointless and avoidable loss of life in both his corps and the formations whose flanks were exposed by his failure to conform with their withdrawal. Leonid Vilgelmovich Lesh, the commander of Third Army at the time, had him dismissed for insubordination, but to the surprise of some, Bezobrazov successfully exploited his personal standing with the tsar to have himself appointed as commander of the new Guards Army later in the year. Once in post, he had many officers who were his personal favourites, and who had been dismissed for a variety of reasons, appointed to his new command, with the result that becoming a senior officer in the Guards Army was more dependent upon being part of Bezobrazov's personal faction than upon the possession of any military skill.[62] However, not everyone regarded Bezobrazov as unsuited to his post. Alfred Knox acknowledged some of his shortcomings, but also noted positive aspects of his personality and appears to have had a cordial relationship with him:

> Bezobrazov had, in fact, no adviser of sufficiently strong character to make his influence felt, and he therefore gave free rein to a somewhat insubordinate disposition. Beloved by those who served under him, he had, on the one hand, quarrelled with every army commander with whom he came in contact, first with Lechitsky and then with [Pavel Adamovich] Plehve [commander of Fifth and Twelfth Armies, then of Northern Front]. He resented the idea of serving under Lesh.[63]

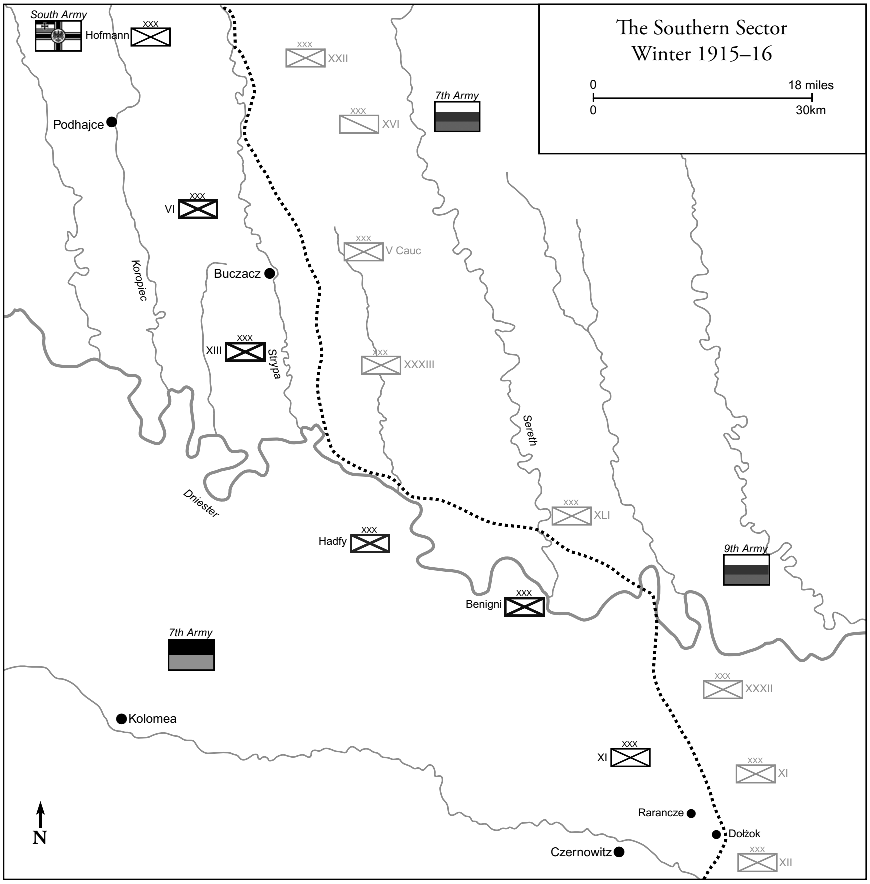
Facing Southwest Front was a mixture of German and Austro-Hungarian forces. In the very south, along the Dniester and defending the approaches of Kolomea as well as the lower Strypa was the Austro-Hungarian Seventh Army commanded by General Karl von Pflanzer-Baltin with nine infantry divisions and four cavalry divisions. To his north, facing Tarnopol, was the German South Army under the command of the Bavarian General Felix von Bothmer with a little over five infantry divisions. Immediately to his north, defending Brody, was General Eduard von Böhm-Ermolli's Second Army with eight infantry divisions and one cavalry division, followed by General Paul Puhallo's First Army with another four infantry divisions; both of these armies were collectively under the control of Böhm-Ermolli. To their north was *Heeresgruppe Linsingen*, whose most southerly formation was the Austro-Hungarian Fourth Army commanded by Archduke Joseph Ferdinand with nine infantry divisions, followed by *Korps Gerock* consisting of six infantry divisions and four cavalry divisions. In total, the Central Powers therefore had some forty-one infantry divisions and nine cavalry divisions; like their Russian opponents, all of them had been badly degraded by the autumn battles.

Given these relative troop strengths, Alexeyev's proposals for an advance on Kolomea and Lemberg seem even more ambitious. Nevertheless, the arrival of fresh reinforcement drafts at least meant that the attackers could look forward to having somewhat better resources at their disposal than in the autumn battles. The troops on the front line continued to complain of ammunition shortages – whatever the improvements both in domestic Russian production and foreign supplies, moving the shells to the batteries in the field remained a difficult problem, particularly in the middle of winter. Inevitably, the movement of supplies would be dependent on railway lines, and there were only two that ran to this section of front; despite this, the logistics staff of *Stavka* and Southwest Front calculated that provided they could run sixteen trains per day on the lines, they would be able to deliver adequate supplies. As for attacking in winter, Alexeyev and Ivanov hoped that the midwinter snows would at least make it possible to advance without having to struggle through the mud that had bedevilled operations throughout the autumn.

In addition to the reinforcement drafts, the Russians deployed for the first time a new formation that had been created to take advantage of the domestic political difficulties of their enemies, a force formed of Czechs who had been taken prisoner earlier in the war, as Brusilov recorded after the war:

> This unit had its own unique history. Many did not wish to see its creation, fearing that the Czech prisoners would prove unreliable. But I insisted, and it turned out that I was right. They fought magnificently in my front … I sent this squad to the most dangerous and difficult locations, and they always performed magnificently in fulfilling their missions.[64]

When they became aware of the existence of the pro-Russian Czech troops, the morale of the opposing *k.u.k.* forces was further damaged. They already regarded their own Czech troops as unreliable, and there was widespread belief that the presence of Czech troops on the other side of the front line would lead to further defections.


The Southern Sector
Winter 1915–16
0
18 miles
0
30km
South Army
Hofmann
XXX
XXII
XVI
7th Army
Podhajce
VI
V Cauc
Koropiec
Buczacz
XIII
Strypa
XXXIII
Sereth
Dniester
XLI
Hadfy
9th Army
Benigni
7th Army
XXXII
Kolomea
XI
XI
Rarancze
Dołżok
Czernowitz
XII
N

Mounting an attack without the enemy noticing preparation proved difficult during the First World War; the assembly of so many men and so much ammunition inevitably attracted the attention of aerial and other reconnaissance, and on this occasion the Austro-Hungarian units received additional warning in the shape of deserters who warned that there would be an attack at Christmas. Fighting started on 23 December at the very southern end of the Eastern Front when Lechitsky's Ninth Army began to advance, and steadily intensified to the east of Czernowitz. Despite snow and fog, the Russians continued to attack with four infantry divisions. Much of the Austro-Hungarian defensive positions were occupied by second line formations, largely Hungarian *Landsturm*, battalions of former gendarmerie, and Ruthenian volunteers. Their weakness was at least partly offset by the massed firepower of the artillery of the Austro-Hungarian XI Corps; General Ignaz Edler von Korda, the corps commander, had organised his guns into three groups, each consisting of three sub-groups to support key points of the defence. When the main Russian attack commenced on 27 December, the Austro-Hungarian batteries were well positioned to tear holes in the ranks of the attackers, bringing the assault by XII, XI and XXXII Corps to a standstill almost before it began. The main Russian objective was the high ground at Dołżok, and the second attempt to push forward during the afternoon was once more smashed by artillery fire.

By the following day, Pflanzer-Baltin had moved reinforcements into the threatened sector, and further Russian attacks foundered once more. During the afternoon, Lechitsky threw in another wave of infantry after a renewed artillery bombardment that reduced the defenders' trenches to ruins; nevertheless, once more supported by their artillery, the defenders held their positions. Throughout the night that followed, the troops exchanged fire with rifles, mortars and hand grenades, and on 29 December, the decimated Russian divisions launched a final attack that once more failed to make any headway before withdrawing to their start line.

Further north, Shcherbachev's Seventh Army attacked on 29 December on a narrow front against the Austro-Hungarian positions along the Strypa. The intention was to force the main defensive line with the troops of II Corps, and then exploit this with XVI Corps, which was held in reserve. In an attempt to prevent his opponents from suspecting that an attack was imminent, Shcherbachev dispensed with any preliminary probing attacks or reconnaissance in force. The attack groups began to move forward through the deep snow on 28 December, and this was sufficient to alert the defenders to the fact that an attack was imminent. Nevertheless, the initial Russian attacks on the Austro-Hungarian VI Corps made some headway, only for further advances to be brought to a standstill by accurate artillery fire against their flanks. On 29 December, Russian artillery conducted a heavy bombardment of the main defensive positions that lasted into the afternoon, but the result was the same: when they attacked, the Russian infantry were torn apart by machine-gun and artillery fire.

After a pause to regroup, Shcherbachev tried again on New Year's Eve. The defenders counted at least six waves of attacks on their positions, preceded by a heavy artillery bombardment. Once more the defences held, and when the final assault was beaten off, the Austro-Hungarian forces even managed to find the energy to pursue them back to their positions, recovering all of the outpost positions that the Russians had captured.[65] The following morning, the Russians launched yet another attack, and once more it was beaten off.

Russian casualties were inevitably heavy. Pflanzer-Baltin's troops estimated that Shcherbachev's army alone lost almost 18,000 men; the defenders of VI Corps lost only 800. Alexeyev had urged a reluctant Ivanov to mount the attacks, and now expressed his dissatisfaction at how they had been conducted:

> The heavy losses are not consistent with the minimal successes. One must take more care with the firestorm on the enemy positions and bring forward all available forces.[66]

This comment sheds an interesting light on tactics. Throughout Mackensen's triumphant campaigns the previous year, there had been numerous occasions when despite a heavy bombardment the German attacks faltered in the face of determined resistance. On those occasions, the artillery resumed their bombardment to suppress the defences that were holding up the advance, on some occasions having to do so several times before the infantry could gain ground. Such coordination between infantry and artillery was clearly a lesson that the Russians still needed to learn. The history of enmity and dissent between the artillery, cavalry and infantry in Russia was a strong feature in debates on how best to modernise the army before the war, and even after more than a year of conflict, old rivalries continued to hamper operations. Reconnaissance to help direct artillery preparation was also a recurrent feature of Mackensen's campaigns; by contrast, much of the preparatory fire of the Russian bombardment against VI Corps fell on forward positions that had already been evacuated before the attack, and was therefore completely wasted.

Nor was there any consistency in the deployment of troops for the assault, with some formations holding back substantial numbers of men, and then committing them in second and third attacks after the initial assault faltered. To an extent, this reflects the problems that commanders in all armies faced. If they used all their strength in the first attack, there was a tendency for any gains to be difficult to exploit as there were no reserves, but if troops were held back, the initial attack had less likelihood of success; and commitment of large numbers of men against intact defences merely resulted in higher casualties with no greater gains.

The gulf between Russian infantry officers in the front line and their superiors – and the gunners – further back is graphically illustrated by the account of one of those who took part in the futile attacks:

> After our artillery preparation, we advanced perhaps a mile [1.5km] under heavy enemy artillery fire. When we were within 500m, we suddenly came under

> machine-gun and rifle fire that had remained silent until then. There was the enemy, in intact trenches with parapets and dugouts behind ten or more rows of intact barbed wire, waiting for us. For hours, we lay on the frozen ground as snow fell; it was not possible to help the wounded, because we were too close to the wire. Behind us though, artillery colonels and captains of the general staff drank rum-spiced tea and wrote their reports: 'After excellent artillery preparation, our glorious troops rushed forward and seized the enemy trenches, but counterattacks by strong reserves stopped them.'[67]

Both Russian armies tried again in the following days. Lechitsky attacked once more on 1 January, preceding his infantry attack towards Czernowitz with a particularly heavy artillery bombardment. The first Russian assault was thrown back by an energetic counterattack but there was a further artillery bombardment in the afternoon, after which the Russians were able to secure perhaps half a mile (0.8km) of the Austro-Hungarian forward positions. However, every attempt to deepen the penetration failed. Nevertheless, the Russian gains were significant in that their artillery observers were now established on the high ground that had dominated the battlefield and allowed them to direct Russian artillery fire into the rear areas of the Austro-Hungarian positions with greater accuracy, where the defenders had previously sheltered in the dead ground of the reverse slope. At dusk, a single regiment of Hungarian *Honvéd* (the Hungarian home guard, made up of older men for the purpose of defending the homeland against invasion) mounted a counterattack; some of the attackers lost their way in the darkness as they struggled through the snow, wrecked trenches and craters, but sufficient reached the Russians to expel them from some of their positions.

The following morning, Korda, the commander of the Austro-Hungarian XI Corps, gathered together his remaining reserves, which amounted to two understrength regiments, and threw them into an attack at first light. Further positions in the front line were recovered, but the Russians remained firmly established on the plateau. By midday, Russian reinforcements had arrived and mounted attacks of their own, and fighting became generalised across the area. Korda wanted to pull further troops out of the line in order to gather them for counterattacks, but Pflanzer-Baltin intervened. Correctly recognising that the likelihood of successful counterattacks diminished the longer that the Russians remained in their positions, he ordered Korda instead to ensure that the formations that had been driven out of the front line trenches were given time to regroup and sufficient local reserves were organised to allow for swift intervention in the event of further Russian attacks, but there were to be no further attempts to recover the ground that had already been lost. An additional infantry brigade was assigned to XI Corps, but Korda was ordered to hold it in reserve on one flank from where it could strike into the rear of any further Russian advance.

Reinforcements were beginning to arrive. A battlegroup consisting of four battalions of Austrian *Landsturm* and two artillery batteries arrived in the theatre from Serbia and was assigned to Pflanzer-Baltin as a new army-level reserve. Additional troops were ordered to the area from Volhynia, where fighting had died down to a more manageable level. They would all be needed; on 3 January, Lechitsky had moved sufficient forces onto the plateau to renew his assault towards Czernowitz. In the face of strong defensive fire, the attacks made no headway whatever, and the following day Lechitsky's artillery made another heavy bombardment of the defensive positions, followed by another assault; again, it was repulsed, but XI Corps was beginning to feel the strain. The fighting since the renewal of attacks on 1 January had cost XI Corps over 8,000 casualties, which, given the fact that all of its formations had started the battle badly understrength, left them looking increasingly fragile. Russian losses, however, were far greater. Lechitsky was forced once more to pause for breath.

Further north, Shcherbachev also renewed his attempts to break through. The Russian XVI Corps was inserted into the front line between II Corps and V Caucasian Corps and attacked at first light on 7 January. Unlike previous assaults, this one appeared to take the defenders by surprise and penetrated into the positions of the Austro-Hungarian 12th Infantry Division on the east bank of the Strypa. Artillery batteries behind the defending infantry were overrun by the attack, but at that moment disaster struck. Through a mixture of poor visibility, confusing orders and human error, the Russian artillery opened a heavy bombardment on the Austro-Hungarian rear areas at the exact moment that the Russian troops broke into the area, inflicting heavy losses upon their own troops. Even as Russian reinforcements struggled forward, a determined Austro-Hungarian counterattack recovered the lost batteries and drove the Russians from the positions that they had captured, restoring the front line. Further Russian attacks during the day succeeded in making local gains, only to lose them in the face of the inevitable counterattacks.

Russian artillery bombarded the Austro-Hungarian defences throughout 8 January along the Strypa, but Austro-Hungarian aerial reconnaissance spotted substantial Russian troop movements behind the front line as the rest of the Russian XVI Corps moved forward to allow the depleted II Corps to be pulled out of line. It was clear that further Russian attacks would be made in the near future, and both sides moved troops to the area from other sectors of the front.

When he became aware that the Russian lines in front of his forces were being thinned, Linsingen proposed an attack of his own with a view to threatening the northern flank of Shcherbachev's army. Falkenhayn appeared to be in favour of such an operation, but Conrad refused to allow it to proceed. On this occasion, the reasons he gave were undoubtedly correct: the terrain was not favourable for such an operation; the local road and rail network had not recovered from the autumn fighting, and would not be able to sustain an offensive operation; and Linsingen's proposed thrust was too far away from the fighting in the south to exert sufficient pressure on the Russian lines. There was an additional reason why he was not in favour of Linsingen mounting an assault that would at least partly use Austro-Hungarian troops: at the first opportunity, he intended to withdraw these troops for use against the Italians. Falkenhayn had made his views about an operation against Italy clear to Conrad on many occasions, and relations between the two headquarters were not good. Consequently, it is little surprise that cooperation was frequently superficial. Unable to come to any agreement, the two headquarters decided to drop the question of any further offensives on the Eastern Front for the moment.

Fighting along the Strypa calmed again despite the deployment of the Russian XVI Corps. Lechitsky had used the intervening days to reorganise his troops in the south, and attempted once again to seize the high ground near Rarancze that dominated the battlefield. The first probing attacks began on 10 January, followed by a much greater effort the following day with at least five separate attacks. Each of them wilted and foundered in the face of defensive fire, with the Austro-Hungarian artillery once more featuring strongly. Inevitably, Lechitsky had to pause once more, and Korda took advantage of the pause to reorganise his defences. The relatively fresh 40th *Honvéd* Infantry Division, recently arrived in XI Corps' sector, moved into the battered front line trenches, and the total artillery strength of XI Corps rose to thirty-five batteries. The defences were tested again on 14 January, but Generalmajor Elmer, the commander of Korda's artillery, had prepared carefully. As soon as the Russian preliminary bombardment began, all of the Russian approach routes were brought under fire, and each attack wave disappeared in a hail of shells almost as it emerged onto the plateau. By the end of the day, the defenders calculated that they had effectively annihilated an entire Russian division.

Despite the terrible casualties that Lechitsky's army had suffered for almost no tangible gain, Ivanov had no intention of abandoning his attempts to break through to Czernowitz.[68] He assigned an additional division to Lechitsky as replacements for the losses he had suffered, and a further attempt was made on

19 January. Once again, the attacks failed to make any progress. The defensive artillery had been reinforced with another battery of heavy mortars, and when the depleted ranks of the Russian infantry managed to reach the defensive trenches, they first came under heavy shellfire, and were then repulsed with severe losses by an infantry counterattack. XI Corps reported that it lost a total of about 1,500 men during the day; Russian casualties were far higher.

To date, the winter battles had cost Ivanov's front tens of thousands of casualties for almost no gain. However, there were signs of more fighting to come. The Russian Guards Army had completed its concentration and organisation, and radio intercepts alerted Pflanzer-Baltin to its arrival in the rear area of the Russian Tenth Army near Tarnopol, together with the Russian VIII Corps. These troop movements had been authorised by Alexeyev in an increasingly desperate attempt to achieve the desired victory that might trigger an Austro-Hungarian retreat towards Lemberg, but closer to the front line, Ivanov was losing heart in the face of such poor levels of success. On 22 January, he wrote to *Stavka* to complain that his attacks had failed through a shortage of artillery and machine-guns, combined with insufficient quantities of ammunition. Further attacks were pointless, he added, given the comparative strengths of attackers and defenders. Even as he dispatched the letter, orders arrived from the tsar ordering a resumption of attacks. Later in the day, a telegram arrived from Alexeyev in response to his letter, suggesting that the failure to coordinate attacks along the entire front was more important than any shortage of firepower, and that artillery fire had not been used effectively to suppress defences. Nor had the infantry been used properly; far more effort should have been made to dig in close to the Austro-Hungarian lines.[69]

Alexeyev's criticisms must have seemed extraordinary to Ivanov. They were made from distant *Stavka* and cannot have been based on any first-hand knowledge of what was happening in the front line. They ignored completely the reality that digging trenches in frozen ground whilst under heavy Austro-Hungarian artillery fire was practically impossible, though the comment that Lechitsky and Shcherbachev had attacked without coordination was reasonable. Ivanov grimly issued orders for a resumption of attacks, only to be betrayed by the weather: a sudden thaw along the Strypa turned the mounds of snow to mud and water, making almost any movement impossible.

Finally, even Alexeyev began to see the futility of further attacks. There was little sign of any favourable impression being made upon Romania – indeed, Russian failures were likely to hinder rather than help diplomatic pressure to bring Romania into the war against the Central Powers, and there were rumours that

Germany, Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria were preparing to apply pressure of their own to force the Bucharest government into joining them rather than the Entente. Consequently, Ivanov was ordered to abandon his attacks. Troops would be pulled out of the front line and deployed in the south, facing the Romanian frontier.

The Russian assaults had been launched with two purposes in mind. Firstly, the intention was to wear down the *k.u.k.* Army in keeping with the outcome of the Chantilly conference; secondly, it was hoped that the defeat of Austro-Hungarian forces in Galicia would make a favourable and decisive impression on Romania. Both of these aims failed badly. Although the *k.u.k.* Army suffered some 30,000 casualties in the fighting, Russian losses were at least three times as high, and as a result any attritional damage was far greater for the Russian Army than its opponent.

The battlefield for the fighting had been selected by *Stavka* based upon the belief that it would be easy to defeat the Austro-Hungarian forces. This was at first glance a reasonable assumption – on almost every occasion that the Russians had attacked the *k.u.k.* Army, they had forced it back. On this occasion they failed completely, and the reasons are worthy of closer attention, firstly because they demonstrate how much one army had learned and how much the other still had to learn, and secondly because of their consequences on military thinking for the rest of the war. In battles in 1914 and much of 1915, Austro-Hungarian officers had repeatedly complained about the lack of support from their artillery, but the winter fighting in Galicia saw the guns of XI Corps smash every attack made against them. Much of the improvement was a result of the fighting against Italy; the repeated attempts by the Italians to smash their way through the Isonzo line were defeated at least partly by concentrated defensive artillery fire, and those experiences were now put to great use by Generalmajor Elmer in the use of XI Corps' guns to smash Lechitsky's assaults.

For much of the war, Russian commanders had blamed all of their setbacks on the shortage of artillery ammunition, and it has been suggested that as a result there was a general belief that once sufficient quantities of shells were available, all would be well.[70] The attacks of the winter of 1915–16 were launched on very narrow frontages, which might have allowed for better concentration of supporting artillery but also presented easy targets for defensive guns. In particular, it was very straightforward to subject the attacking infantry to flanking fire that swept along the entire breadth of the attack, with devastating results. Coordination between artillery and infantry was rudimentary at best, with catastrophic results on the Strypa front when Russian artillery bombarded the leading Russian infantry formations. Elsewhere, there were no mechanisms by which attacking infantry could call on artillery support when they ran into trouble in the manner that the Germans repeatedly did throughout 1915. Indeed, there seems to have been little attempt to devise any tactics for the attack; it was simply assumed that now the gunners had sufficient ammunition, they would crush the Austro-Hungarian defences, and when the Russian infantry advanced, their opponents would simply run away. Reality proved to be very different. The Austro-Hungarian front line inevitably suffered considerable physical damage from the preliminary Russian bombardments, but the defending infantry emerged intact to subject any Russians who survived the shelling of the Austro-Hungarian artillery to lethal defensive fire.

Inevitably, much of the post-battle analysis that was produced predominantly by Shcherbachev and Ivanov concentrated on the preoccupation with shell shortages. Even though ammunition had been available in larger quantities than before, Ivanov and both army commanders complained that it was still not enough. It also transpired that, for a variety of reasons, the expected sixteen trains per day on the two railway lines supplying the attacking armies had not materialised – instead, the daily average during the fighting was only four.[71] Although the weather made it difficult to move trains and the supplies that they were meant to transport to the right locations, the main reason appears to have been planning failure. Despite repeated examples of logistics failures, staff officers tasked with ensuring adequate supplies continued to struggle through a mixture of inadequate authority and administrative resources to carry out their tasks.

Another failure that Ivanov and Shcherbachev both recognised was that reserves had been held too far back, and when they attempted to advance in support of the leading formations they were subjected to heavy artillery fire that killed hundreds before they could even reach the battlefield. On the Western Front, the British and French routinely attempted to build large bunkers close to the front line where reserves could be gathered in relative safety, but despite repeated liaison visits to France, or by French officers to Russia, senior Russian officers continued to ignore the lessons learned by their western allies. Instead, they persisted in believing that, if sufficient artillery ammunition were made available, all would be well. To an extent, this was a continuation of the long-running feud between the infantry and artillery that dated back to long before the onset of the war. The gunners continued to insist that they were given greater priority, while the infantry blamed all their failures on the artillery. Demands from artillerists for a minimum supply of 4.5 million artillery rounds per month were utterly unrealistic on two levels. Firstly, there was no possibility of Russia finding such huge quantities of ammunition, either from domestic production or by purchasing from other countries; and secondly, the gunners should have known that even if these shells could be made available, the result would be that Russia's guns would wear out within weeks with such a high rate of fire. However, looking beyond the supply of artillery ammunition would have required a radical examination of tactical and operational doctrine, and there was simply no appetite for such an analysis.

Nevertheless, there was a growing realisation that the problems faced by the Russian Army went to the heart of the military establishment, and indeed to the very core of tsarist society. There were now growing numbers of middle-class officers in the army, and as was the case in every army in the First World War, this was slowly changing the behaviour of a body of men who had in the past been dominated by the aristocracy and other relatively narrow groups, but the upper echelons remained wedded to their ways. For example, the Guards Army, composed of units that had already fought with distinction in the war, was subjected to rigorous training shortly after it was formed in accordance with manuals that were nearly 40 years old. But even within the ranks of the 'old guard' of senior officers, there was a degree of understanding about the nature of the problem, as Knox wrote in his diary on 6 February 1916:

> K— told me that Prince Lvov, President of the Zemstvo Union, had visited *Stavka* with Chelnikov, the Mayor of Moscow, ten days ago, and had had an interview with Alexeyev. They found him in much better spirits than in November, when he was terribly depressed. He said that the morale of the troops, which was bad in November, had much improved. He maintained, however, that owing to the lack of technical equipment on the Russian Front, the decision would have to be fought out elsewhere. The Galician offensive had failed because of many mistakes. The army, he said, lacked proper leaders. There was hardly a single man of ability above the rank of regiment commander. The Emperor never interfered in matters of military direction. Alexeyev is also said to have remarked that the Emperor had not a single honest man about him except Count Friedrichs, who was stupid, deaf and blind.[72]

Knox noted that the strains of the war were everywhere in Russian society, but his attempts to discuss them with officials had limited effect:

> In Petrograd and the large towns the burden of the war was being felt more and more. The cost of necessaries had risen enormously, and it was a mystery how the smaller officials managed to live. Of course there was an abundance of everything in the country, if only the railways had been able to distribute it.

Foreign observers had grown accustomed to the long queues of poor people waiting for hours in the cold for their turn at the bread-shops and to the dreadfully crowded tramways. These inconveniences had continued so long that they had begun to think the people were too docile to make an organised attempt against the government.

I went to see [Mikhail Vladimirovich] Rodzianko, the President of the Duma, to talk about the internal situation. I told him that officers' wives in Petrograd existed on supplies of flour and sugar that their husbands sent them from the front, and he replied that his own son, who was serving in the Guards, brought him presents of sugar whenever he came on leave. I spoke of the preventable sufferings of the people and of my astonishment at their patience under conditions that would have very soon driven me to break windows. He only laughed and said that I had a hot head.

Rodzianko … was emphatically of the opinion that Russia would fight to the end. He said: 'There may be some people in favour of peace, but they do not dare to speak … Russia is all right if England would only give her more heavy guns and more money.'

In spite of the optimism of the President of the Duma, the situation was dangerous, for the Rasputin scandal continually undermined respect for authority. It was said that Junkovsky, the Assistant Minister of the Interior, had been dismissed from his post in the autumn because he had arrested Rasputin for disgraceful conduct at a night restaurant in Moscow, and Prince Orlov, the Chief of the Tsar's Military Cabinet, also lost his appointment for venturing to remonstrate with his imperial master on the same scandal …

In this matter of Rasputin the tsar was not to be moved, and it was soon realised that it was hopeless to remonstrate with him. It was the duty of our ambassador to press as far as possible on the tsar the necessity for liberal reforms in order to meet the public demand, and in this matter he always had the sympathy of Sazonov, the liberally minded Minister of Foreign Affairs, but Sazonov specially asked him, when speaking to the tsar on the internal situation, to avoid all mention of Rasputin.

… A few days later [in early February] a temporary officer told me that he was quite certain that there would be a revolution after the war, since the attitude of the army had completely changed owing to the death of so many officers of the old 'cut-and-dried reactionary type'.

It was all a matter of officers. Russia had an abundance of men, but was commencing to feel the shortage of experienced officers and NCOs, as well as of armament and equipment.[73]

Had the winter offensive in Galicia achieved any significant success, this would undoubtedly have improved the mood on the 'home front'. Instead, the news of further failures merely darkened the already grim atmosphere. It might have been worse. On 29 January, Falkenhayn met Ludendorff, and the latter proposed an offensive by *Ober Ost* across the Daugava into northeast Latvia. Such an advance, in the general direction of Petrograd (though still a considerable distance away), might have triggered the unrest that Knox had written about. But Falkenhayn was not interested; perhaps basing his decisions on the failure of *Ober Ost* to deliver a quick victory in East Prussia in early 1915, and perhaps to block the ambitions of his opponents who were centred on Hindenburg and Ludendorff, he ordered that no such attack was to take place. In Kovno, the current location of Hindenburg's headquarters, Hoffmann and other staff officers continued to fret. It might be possible to capture Riga with a bold attack, shortening the front line and capturing tens of thousands of prisoners; however, this would require additional troops (Hoffmann estimated between eight and ten divisions) to be sent from the west, and such a step was anathema to Falkenhayn.[74]

The great bulk of Austro-Hungarian casualties in the winter battles were caused by Russian artillery during the preparatory bombardments. The defensive earthworks consisted of trenches with overhead protective sheets that were intended to ward off shrapnel, but analysis after the fighting showed that plunging Russian shells simply punched through the 'shrapnel roofs' and then exploded beneath them. In order to avoid such casualties in future, it was decided that it would be better to have deeper trenches, with bunkers and foxholes in which infantry could shelter better from bombardment. This would undoubtedly reduce casualties from Russian bombardments, but there was a price: it would take longer for defending infantry to emerge and man the firestep to fight off the approaching Russian infantry. In the aftermath of the winter fighting, this detail was either not noticed or ignored.

Until now, the *k.u.k.* Army had endured a poor war, losing most of its encounters with the Russians after initial successes in August 1914. Its morale and confidence had suffered repeated blows, and the hope that the Black-Yellow Offensive in Volhynia in the autumn of 1915 would go some way to restoring some self-belief, had failed completely. It was this perceived weakness that Alexeyev had hoped to exploit by targeting the sector of the front where there were no German troops. Instead of disintegrating as many – including some Germans – expected, the Austro-Hungarian units showed great determination, and the artillery in particular demonstrated a new level of professionalism that did a great deal to boost confidence throughout the army. Instead of proving an easy opponent and giving the Russians an opportunity to put pressure on Romania to enter the war, the winter battles did a great deal to restore pride throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

However, this surge in confidence was not without consequences. Conrad's mood swung once more from deep pessimism to unrealistic optimism about what his armies could achieve. Largely at his request, there was a conference in Vienna on 7 January to discuss future strategy, chaired by Foreign Minister Stephan Burián. Whilst it was not possible to make any conclusions about future territorial arrangements in Poland and Russia – German agreement would be required for this – there was general consensus that any future peace that satisfied the requirement for the preservation of Austria-Hungary's prestige and interests could only be achieved after Italy had been defeated. Conrad was not alone in regarding the Italians, who had been allied to both Germany and Austria-Hungary before the war, as being little more than opportunists who sought to expand their territories at the expense of the Dual Monarchy.[75]

Throughout the army, there was a growing belief that future Russian attacks could be repulsed without difficulty, and the time had come to concentrate attention and resources on defeating the Italians. This conviction would be tested in full before the end of the year.

CHAPTER 3

LAKE NAROCH

As the fighting near Czernowitz and along the Strypa died down, the report written by Shcherbachev on 25 January was passed up the military chain of command. In this report, he concluded that his army had lacked sufficient heavy artillery to achieve the ambitious objectives expected of the initial bombardment – either the objectives would have to be scaled back in future, or more heavy guns would be needed. In addition, the Russian Army needed to develop the sort of liaison demonstrated by the Germans, whose infantry was able to call on artillery support quickly whenever it ran into resistance. Such closer communication would also reduce the number of damaging 'friendly fire' incidents. Once the battle began, senior officers had shown insufficient energy in directing the progress of the troops, often limiting themselves to repeating the same orders regardless of the reality on the ground. His report was shared throughout the Russian Army, in the hope that future attacks would fare better.[76]

Elsewhere on the Eastern Front, a brief artillery bombardment almost had major consequences, at least for the German royal family. The 27-year-old Prince Oskar, the fifth son of Kaiser Wilhelm II, was a serving officer who had been awarded the Iron Cross for leading his regiment with distinction on the Western Front in 1914, and was now in the east. On 14 February, accompanied by several senior officers, Oskar was due to visit the front line. General Karl Litzmann, commander of XL Corps, recalled what happened as they approached the forward positions on a hill known to the soldiers as the Hindenburg Heights:

> Before us in the grey February sky was a tethered Russian balloon. Had the crew of the balloon noticed the arrival of our vehicles and reported them? In any case, the Russian batteries opened fire energetically against the Hindenburg Heights.

> Our batteries responded but could not suppress the enemy fire; it just grew heavier.
>
> My son [a serving officer in XL Corps] came back from his company sector to the army commander and suggested in his quiet, tactful manner that we wait until the enemy artillery fire slackened. [General Hermann von] Eichhorn [the army commander] did not wish to hold back. Led by my son, he resolutely strode forwards. He ascended the Hindenburg Heights along a communication trench.
>
> We reached our combat trenches and came under very heavy fire. The Russian shells howled swiftly overhead. But the troops … maintained an impeccable demeanour. The sight of their alert, confident faces delighted Eichhorn.
>
> The trenches were narrow and deep … we had barely reached the foremost part of the crest when the fateful round – a heavy Russian shell – landed. It struck the breastwork and exploded with a crash that stunned the senses. We were all sprayed with snow and earth. I felt the powerful blast of air followed by a sharp pain in my right ear, but knew nothing of the tragedy that had taken place just a few steps behind me, beyond the next turn. We stood for a moment, and I chuckled as I wiped the dirt from my eyes.
>
> … The colonel [Mengelbier, Litzmann's friend and chief of staff] was just beyond the turn. His hat was shredded and I could see the blood from his wounds running over his head and face. Schleinitz [the battalion commander] carried the colonel to the nearest dugout …
>
> My son ran over to a field telephone to summon medical help. Eichhorn and I reached the dugout of the 40th Foot Artillery Battalion. Eichhorn wanted to wait there for a medical update on our wounded. My son ran forward under fire to bring us the report.
>
> Meanwhile, Hauptmann Kaupisch, the general staff officer of the 79th Reserve Division, had arrived and brought good news about the prince, Hell and Goerne [commander of 261st Infantry Regiment, who had also been wounded]. 'But – Oberstleutnant Mengelbier was badly wounded. In short, he's dead.' There was a painful silence, broken only by the crash of guns and exploding shells.[77]

Prince Oskar escaped unharmed. The loss of the prince would have been a serious blow to German prestige and public opinion, but perhaps more significantly, several senior officers might have been killed in the artillery strike. Eichhorn was a tough, reliable army commander with a string of successes behind him, and Litzmann had repeatedly led his troops to victory, notably in the battles of Łódź in 1914, the Masurian Lakes in early 1915, and the capture of Kovno later in the year. However, the death of Mengelbier was a serious blow to Litzmann and

XL Corps. The two men had met almost exactly a year earlier when they were both appointed to their posts in the newly formed corps, and rapidly developed the close and instinctively cooperative relationship between a commander and his chief of staff that was the hallmark of the German military system. Mengelbier had clearly made a strong impression on his comrades, as is evident from Litzmann's description of the reaction at his corps headquarters to the news of the death of the chief of staff:

> The sense of loss was deeply and sincerely felt by all. Everyone had valued Mengelbier's outstandingly gifted, energetic and tactful personality and his compassionate, untiring care for the welfare of the troops. I received countless letters and telegrams of condolence, including from his previous commanding officers and from corps and division commanders who had worked alongside XL Corps in earlier operations.[78]

In a war of such heavy losses, such moments must have been widespread throughout all the armies that struggled to find a way to win the conflict.

Meanwhile, during the weeks that Shcherbachev and Lechitsky threw their troops in vain at the Austro-Hungarian defences, Russia's allies in the west began detailed discussions on how to implement the agreements that had been reached at Chantilly in December 1915. Joffre almost immediately raised the prospect of a joint Anglo-French offensive on a 60-mile (100km) front either side of the Somme, adding in January that he was preparing for assaults at five different points of the front line – one on the Somme, another in Champagne where the French Army had already spilled so much blood for almost no gain, and three further east. Not all of them would necessarily be executed – this would depend on developments such as German counter-preparations. However, Joffre reminded Haig, the new commander of British forces in France, that it was necessary to maintain pressure along the front line to wear down German forces before the major attacks of the summer, and to that end he urged Haig to attack north of the Somme in April.

By now, there were unmistakable signs that the Germans were preparing a major attack at Verdun – Falkenhayn's intention to create a battle of attrition in which the French Army would be bled white required the assembly of substantial numbers of troops, artillery and supplies, and the preparatory movements could not be hidden from aerial reconnaissance. The British had begun tentative preparations for the proposed attritional attacks scheduled for April, but in early February there were further discussions between the two allies, at which it was agreed not to waste resources on such attacks. Instead, there would be a major joint effort along the Somme front in midsummer, at the same time that Italian and Russian forces struck on their respective fronts. Joffre also ceased planning for his own multitude of attacks; deserters had alerted the French to the imminent attack on Verdun due to commence in mid-February. This was delayed by inclement weather, but a captured copy of orders issued by Crown Prince Wilhelm – whose troops would lead the attack on Verdun – confirmed the imminence of the offensive.[79] Reserves were dispatched to the sector, and on 21 February, a great barrage of artillery fire from the massed German guns confirmed that what Falkenhayn hoped would be the decisive battle of the war had begun.

Whilst British memory of the First World War is dominated by the Somme and Ypres, there is no question that Verdun is the iconic episode of the conflict for France, and to an extent Germany. Ultimately, Falkenhayn's plans failed, as the German Army was unable to secure the high ground around the fortress city from where it was planned that German artillery would crush the French Army; the French policy of rotating formations through Verdun before they suffered catastrophic losses was misinterpreted by *OHL*, where it was believed that this policy was actually due to the units being badly degraded in keeping with Falkenhayn's intentions. Consequently, the German attempts to seize the hills around Verdun continued long after any real prospect of success had disappeared, and by the end of the fighting – which continued for the rest of the year – casualties on both sides were broadly similar. Far from bleeding the French Army to death, the battle inflicted huge damage on the strength and morale of the German Army.[80]

Many in *Ober Ost* complained that they were not party to Falkenhayn's plans, but this is hardly surprising. The feud between *Ober Ost* and *OHL* was often bitter, and in any case *OHL* was technically the superior command and there was no strict need for Falkenhayn to consult subordinate commanders who were serving on what he considered a secondary front. Writing after the war, Max Hoffmann suggested that Falkenhayn's plans around Verdun were ill conceived, and that he might have done better to consult other senior figures if only to seek their opinions. Following a suggestion from General Otto von Below, commander of the German Eighth Army in the northeast sector of the Eastern Front, *Ober Ost* repeatedly proposed an operation to encircle and capture Riga; whilst this would not have dealt a mortal blow to Russia, it would have shortened the front line and inflicted further serious damage on the Russians. The fact that it would have enhanced the reputation of *Ober Ost* was something that was not lost on either the plan's proponents at *Ober Ost* or its opponents at *OHL*. Hoffmann went on to suggest that more might have been achieved if Falkenhayn had supported Conrad's proposals for a major offensive against Italy:

> If it were impossible to deal a decisive blow on the chief front, I would have transferred the operations to Italy, the secondary theatre of war, but I would have made an attack there on a grand scale. Judging by the success that the Eleventh German Army really had in 1917, if the attack General Conrad had proposed making from Arsiero-Asiago had been executed simultaneously with a similar attack from Flitsch-Tolmein it might have led to a decisive defeat of the Italians. Naturally it is impossible to say if such a defeat would have caused the Italians to seek for peace but despite the pressure that England exercised on the Allies, the outbreak of internal troubles might have led to it. If we had succeeded in continuing our offensive to the line Genoa-Venice the results would have been very great not only for Italy, but through its effects on the Western front for France also.[81]

However, it should be added that Hoffmann himself had expressed a low opinion of the fighting prowess of the *k.u.k.* Army, and his support for an attack on Italy does not appear in his diary entries of the time. This suggestion of a decisive assault on Italy – justified by the actual German successes at Caporetto in 1917 – is therefore almost certainly a case of Hoffmann being wise many years after the event.

At the outset of the Battle of Verdun, it seemed as if the Germans might succeed. Verdun was defended by a ring of immensely strong forts, though artillery had been removed from many of them, and one of these – at Douaumont – fell on 25 February. There were great concerns that further German gains were imminent, and in early March Joffre wrote to the Russians:

> The enemy is able to develop his operation as a result of transfer of troops from non-French fronts … [including] two divisions apparently taken from the Russian Front (1st and 3rd Guards).
>
> I ask our allies: to take the necessary measures to put strong pressure on the enemy in order to prevent him from transferring units from other fronts and to deprive him of his freedom of manoeuvre; to notify us immediately if any units disappear from their fronts; and in anticipation of the development that is now probable with German operations on our front and on the basis of the decisions reached at Chantilly, I ask that the Russian Army immediately start preparations to attack.

> … [I am aware that] you insisted on the thorough and comprehensive training that is necessary when attacking heavily fortified positions, as well as the requirement for extensive material resources and large forces to implement and develop the attack. However, as concentration of these resources and troops will inevitably require considerable time, it is necessary to commence appropriate training urgently so as not to give the enemy the opportunity to exhaust the French Army.
>
> Please advise me as soon as possible of General Alexeyev's intentions in this regard, and where he suggests the attack will fall.[82]

There must have been an odd sense of *déjà vu* in *Stavka* when this request arrived. At the beginning of the war, the French had repeatedly pressurised Russia to attack Germany in an attempt to force the Germans to divert forces away from the Western Front, even though the Russians felt that their preparations for war were incomplete; now, France was demanding a similar response, again at a time when Russian units were unready. In any event, Joffre's letter somewhat overstated what had been agreed at Chantilly. The intention had been to wear down German and Austro-Hungarian forces prior to launching coordinated attacks in the summer, but Falkenhayn's attack on Verdun had seized the initiative. The officers of *Stavka* might also have been excused a moment of wry amusement; during the Chantilly conference, Joffre had berated the Russians for requesting French help on several occasions to try to distract German attention throughout 1915.[83]

To an extent, the Russians had anticipated events. In a report written in late January, General Evert, the commander of West Front, advised that the absence of any new German formations along the entire Eastern Front, at a time when it was known that German troops that had taken part in the invasion of Serbia were being redeployed, made it highly likely that the next German effort would be in the west:

> If this happens, even in purely narrow self-interest we cannot remain passive and give the Germans the opportunity to break our allies … we are obliged to attack at once, as soon as the Germans attack the French, without any delay and with all our energy.[84]

When he wrote this, Evert was unaware of the agreements reached at Chantilly; it seems that Yakov Zhilinsky, the Russian representative at the conference, showed no urgency in communicating with *Stavka*, and Alexeyev in turn did not inform the front commanders until late January. Zhilinsky did not have a particularly good reputation. He was chief of the general staff at the outset of the war, and it was widely believed that he had been appointed to this position by Sukhomlinov, who was minister for war at the time, largely in order to ensure that the post was filled by someone who was no threat to Sukhomlinov himself. Whilst he was popular with the tsar, almost everyone else regarded him as more a sycophant than a serious army officer. Nor did he impress western officials in France, where he repeatedly attempted to discredit accurate assessments of the losses suffered by Russia during the war. Joffre wrote:

> General Zhilinsky, who I had known in Petrograd when he was chief of the general staff, had made an impression on me that he was neither strong nor honest.[85]

Nevertheless, Evert's assessment was accurate and timely, even if it was partly motivated by self-interest; if it was proper for Russia to attack to reduce pressure on France, then it would be equally proper for Russia to demand attacks by its western allies when German pressure was applied in the east. And, of course, there was the possibility of making gains at the expense of the Germans while they were concentrating on the west. Unfortunately for him, the two men who were in a position to make decisions that would have improved the likelihood of success of any planned attack chose to do little. Tsar Nicholas, the commander-in-chief, had almost no military experience to guide him, and Alexeyev, his chief of staff, was unwilling to act without the tsar's authorisation; nor did he make any attempt to seek such authorisation. It was only when Joffre's message arrived that serious consideration was given to a new Russian attack. Alexeyev now convened a meeting on 24 February that included all three front commanders, where it was decided that, given the losses suffered by Ivanov's troops in January, any new attack would have to be made by one or both of the other fronts. After some discussion, the point chosen was the junction between the two fronts.

Alexeyev wrote a reply to Joffre, telling the French commander that the attack would commence on about 23 March; even by delaying until then, there would be insufficient time for all Russian units to be replenished and resupplied. He added that the time of year was not favourable, with the weather prone to sudden freezes and thaws. Official orders were issued on 16 March, calling for an advance to a line running approximately south-southeast from Mitau (now Jelgava). This would drive back the German forces immediately to the south of Riga, and would threaten the recapture of Vilna and other important towns in the western parts of the tsar's empire, which had been lost the previous year. Such an advance would also eliminate any possibility of a German advance on Petrograd, something that had repeatedly troubled Russian thinking during the second half of 1915.

These were ambitious objectives, given the inability of Ivanov's troops to gain more than a foothold in the Austro-Hungarian defences earlier in the year. Numerically, the odds were far more favourable than those faced by Ivanov; at the conference on 24 February, Alexeyev presented figures that showed that Northern and West Fronts had 266,000 and 643,000 infantry respectively, whereas the German forces facing them had 495,000 in total. There was also an advantage in cavalry – a collective Russian strength of 98,000 compared to 41,000. However, the defenders would have considerable advantages. The terrain, particularly around Lake Naroch, was swampy and prone to flooding. Any partial thaw would make rapid movement impossible. Just five days after the conference, Evert appeared to have serious reservations about any planned attack. He wrote to Alexeyev to point out that, according to historical data on meteorological conditions, the attack would take place precisely at the time of year when it was most likely that the thaw would have set in. Nevertheless, Alexeyev pressed ahead with the plan. The French needed to be relieved, and the prevailing view in *Stavka* was that only by attacking the Germans would this be achieved.[86]

The forces potentially at the disposal of the two fronts for their attack were substantial. Northern Front had Twelfth Army defending Riga and the line of the River Daugava with ten infantry divisions and three cavalry divisions, and Fifth Army with an additional fifteen infantry divisions and seven cavalry divisions extending the line along the Daugava to Dünaburg (Daugavpils). Vladimir Nikolayevich Gorbatovsky, commander of Twelfth Army, was another of the large group of Russian generals in their sixties who had served in the Russo-Japanese War. He had a reputation for caution amongst his colleagues and the Germans, and during the fighting in Lithuania and Latvia in 1915, the Germans repeatedly took advantage of this to shuffle troops from one position to another in the sure knowledge that Gorbatovsky would not be innovative or decisive enough to take advantage of any temporary weakness. Vasily Iosifovich Gurko, commander of Fifth Army, was a completely different personality. Aged 51, he was far younger than most Russian senior officers, and had shown considerable skill when leading cavalry forces in East Prussia in 1914. After this, he commanded IV Corps with equal skill and distinction in central Poland. The commander of Northern Front, Alexei Nikolayevich Kuropatkin, was an uninspiring figure, more in keeping with his contemporaries than Gurko. He was 67 years old, having previously served as Russia's war minister immediately before the Russo-Japanese War. He pleaded with the tsar for an active post at the outbreak of the

First World War, but he was not popular with Grand Duke Nikolai and his appeals were turned down until the tsar took personal control of the army. Then, he was assigned first to command of the Grenadiers Corps, then to Fifth Army before taking over Northern Front in late February 1916. He had a reputation for showing great concern for the well being of ordinary soldiers, was a keen chess-player, and made a good impression on Gurko:

> General Kuropatkin took up his duties in the middle of February and, without going to Pskov where the staff [of Northern Front] was, commenced with a tour of the army staffs, visiting one army corps of each army, reviewed the units resting, and always inspected some part of the front trenches. Naturally, this kind of action was much in his favour. The matter stood as follows: the enormous distances separating staffs of a front from their front lines in their turn corresponded to the enormous extent of our fighting lines. Consequently the commander-in-chief [of the front] and several of the army commanders very seldom visited their troops in the front lines. As for the commander-in-chief visiting the front positions, this would require a three days' absence from headquarters … The value of such visits lies not only in the appearance of the commander-in-chief amidst his troops in the front lines, but also in the knowledge every unit has that it is always possible for the commander-in-chief to appear in advanced positions personally to check the work of the troops and the chiefs on the spot.[87]

Whilst Gurko might have been impressed by Kuropatkin, others regarded his ability to command an entire front as questionable. Many felt that he lacked any sense of forcefulness; he was variously described as 'absolutely wanting in force of character' and as a man who had been resurrected after previously being fully tried and found wanting.[88]

Kuropatkin was appointed at short notice when his predecessor, Pavel Plehve, became unwell. It would prove to be a fatal illness for Plehve, who died a few weeks later. Knox had made critical reports about him earlier in the war, but offered a balanced summary after his death:

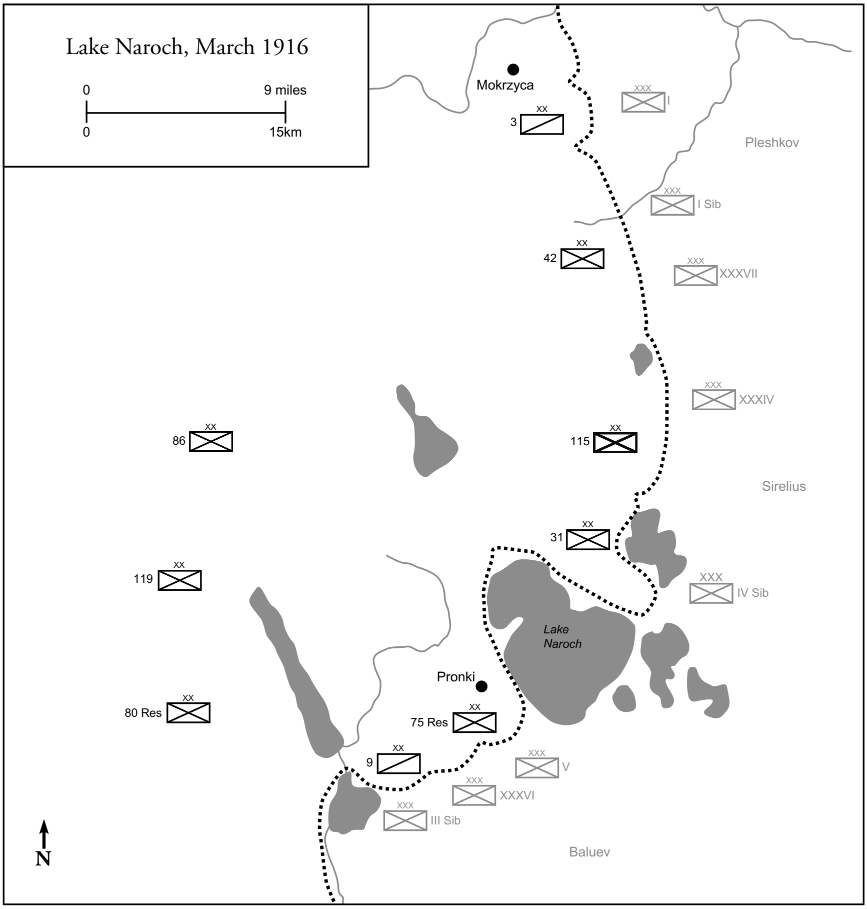
> His methods were sometimes singular, and he consequently had many enemies. Dolgov, whom he removed from the command of XIX Corps, said that in the Dvinsk [now Daugavpils] bridgehead in the autumn of 1915 Plehve posted a Cossack piquet in rear of one of his divisions with orders to report on any movement of the staff to the front or to the rear. Indeed, it was said that he posted

> Cossack piquets on all the bridges to see that none of the corps staff returned to the right bank. Dolgov complained that he had been forced to live with his staff in a stable on the brink of the left bank, where field shrapnel flew over his head while he supped!
>
> Whatever means Plehve employed, they attained the required object, and even his enemies allowed that no other general could have saved Dvinsk. He was, with the exception of the first two months of the war, continually employed against the Germans. His rescue of Second Army at Łódź in 1914 and his defence of Dvinsk in 1915 were two performances that no Russian general surpassed in the course of the war.[89]

West Front had far more forces at its disposal than Kuropatkin's two armies in the north. Its most northern army was Alexander Ivanovich Litvinov's First Army with twelve infantry divisions and three cavalry divisions, holding the front from Dünaburg to Lake Naroch. Next in line was Vladimir Vasilyevich Smirnov's Second Army with eight infantry divisions and a single cavalry division, facing Lake Naroch and extending the front south to Smorgon. The other three armies of West Front – Tenth, Fourth and Third Armies – would play little part in the coming battle.

Facing them were the troops of *Ober Ost*. In the north was the Army of the Niemen, renamed Eighth Army, along the entire width of Northern Front, with a little over sixteen infantry divisions and four cavalry divisions, under the command of Otto von Below. The front line for perhaps 30 miles (50km) either side of Lake Naroch was held by Hermann von Eichhorn's Tenth Army, with eleven infantry divisions and three cavalry divisions. To his south were the five infantry divisions of Twelfth Army, commanded by General Max von Fabeck.

Evert did what he could to concentrate troops in the critical sector. He assigned XXIV and XXVII Corps and III Caucasian Corps from his front reserves to Smirnov's Second Army, and ordered the transfer of XXXV Corps from Fourth Army to Second Army in addition to various artillery formations. It was a daunting task. The troops had barely two weeks to assemble. Some had to travel over 60 miles (100km) on foot along unmetalled roads covered in snow, taking their supplies with them. The plan of campaign was straightforward: with its substantial reinforcements, Second Army would be the leading formation in the assault, with First Army on its northern flank and Tenth Army to the south ready to exploit its successes. In his initial order, Evert left the exact deployment of forces to the individual army commanders, whom he judged to be better placed than he was to determine the details of the operation. However, on 13 March, he issued new and


Lake Naroch, March 1916
0
9 miles
0
15km
Mokrzyca
3
I
Pleshkov
I Sib
42
XXXVII
XXXIV
86
115
Sirelius
31
119
IV Sib
Lake Naroch
Pronki
80 Res
75 Res
9
V
XXXVI
III Sib
Baluev
N

more specific instructions. Smirnov was ordered to concentrate his attacks on either flank of his army.[90] The reason for this change appears to have been to ensure better coordination of effort between Smirnov's forces and the armies on his flanks, rather than any consideration for the terrain or German defences.

Of all the generals commanding armies for the tsar, Smirnov was one of the least likely to succeed in mounting a successful offensive operation. At the time of the Lake Naroch Operation, as it became known in Russian accounts, he was 66 years old, with unspectacular service in the Russo-Turkish War of 1876 as the highlight of his career. He commanded II Siberian Corps during the repression of the 1905 Revolution, and owed his subsequent high position to the perception that his loyalty to the tsar was unquestionable. One of his staff officers in the headquarters of Second Army described him as 'soft and delicate', and he was rarely seen in the front line.[91] On some occasions in the First World War, the lack of drive or skill of a commander was offset by a capable chief of staff; this was not the case in Second Army. Mikhail Sukovkin was even more anonymous than his boss. Smirnov had taken command of Second Army after its narrow escape at the Battle of Łódź in 1914; it was widely known that he left almost all decisions to Sukovkin, who simply passed on orders received from higher commands while Smirnov himself spent much of his day playing solitaire.[92] Shortly before the coming battle, Smirnov took to his sick bed. It is not clear whether this was a real or 'diplomatic' illness to avoid being in command in the imminent assault, but it could not have come at a more inopportune moment. In his absence, Evert appointed Alexander Franzevich Ragosa, commander of Fourth Army, to take temporary command of Second Army.

Ragosa commanded the Russian 19th Infantry Division at the start of the war, and then took command of XXV Corps, achieving some success in the fighting against the Austro-Hungarian Fourth Army during the summer of 1915. Shortly after, he took command of the Russian Fourth Army, and was perhaps fortunate to be in command as the German offensive was winding down; when the great Russian retreat finally ended, he was credited – not entirely without justification – with stopping the Germans from reaching Minsk. Now, arriving at the headquarters of Second Army late during the preparation phase, Ragosa was no position to get to know his subordinates or to make any changes to existing plans; he simply had to make the best of what was placed before him.

The numerical strength of the opposing sides greatly favoured the Russians, but the quality of the commanding officers was substantially in favour of the Germans. All of the German army commanders had experienced success in the previous year, and had the confidence of both their subordinates and their superiors. By contrast, none of the Russian army commanders – with the possible exception of Ragosa, who could be regarded as having been fortunate to take command of Fourth Army just as the German offensive was running out of energy – had any notable achievements behind them. To a very large extent, they owed their survival to a lack of any alternative candidates. Much the same could be said of some of the corps commanders who would feature in the coming battle. Leonid Ottovich Sirelius, commander of IV Siberian Corps, was not held in high regard; Alexeyev questioned his ability to show the necessary vigour and organisational ability to play his part in an offensive, but was unable to arrange for his dismissal, allegedly because an elderly female member of the Romanov royal family held Sirelius in high regard and used her influence with the tsar to protect him.[93]

The troops who would launch the assault on the German positions were no better or worse than any other Russian army of the day. The ranks contained a diminishing number of veterans, and large numbers of recruits with variable levels of training. The losses of the previous year had necessitated the premature transfer of recruits from training establishments to the front line, where men learned the techniques of modern warfare while they fought and died. There were also large numbers of *Opolchenie*, many of whom bitterly resented being sent to the front at all; however, for the moment at least, they showed the characteristic stoicism that was such a strong feature of the Russian soldier. Although equipment levels were better than in previous years, they remained low by comparison to those of other armies; Second Army would have between fourteen and fifteen artillery pieces per kilometre of front line, at a time when armies on the Western Front mustered over seventy guns per kilometre. Nearly 50 per cent of the guns that hammered at the defences in Belgium and France were categorised as heavy artillery; by contrast, Second Army would have only 29 per cent of its artillery complement made up of heavy guns.[94] Even allowing for the attacker's prerogative to concentrate his forces at places of his choosing, the odds of a successful assault were not good, and in view of Shcherbachev's report following his own defeats, the Russians would have to limit their expectations of what their modest numbers of heavy guns could achieve. To make matters worse, the apparent numerical superiority in terms of infantry was seriously undermined by the fact that, despite improvements in supply, nearly 24,000 men in Second Army did not have rifles.[95]

On the eve of the attack, Evert sent a further message to Ragosa. He advised the acting commander of Second Army to be flexible about where and how he should exploit any initial gains. He followed this with extensive advice about ensuring that flanks were protected, that there was good liaison both up and down the command chain and also with neighbouring formations, that supplies were held far enough forward to allow gains to be exploited swiftly, that multiple routes should be cleared through minefields and barbed wire, that cavalry should be available to accelerate the advance through any deep penetration – a total of seventeen points.[96] All of them were entirely appropriate, but it is astonishing that Evert thought it worth listing them at such a late stage of planning, when the staff of Second Army were surely too busy getting ready for the imminent attack to take time to consider how well they had addressed their superior's list of items. Given Evert's concerns about attacking at this time of year and his awareness of the rifle shortages of his troops, it is possible that the telegram was intended as a precaution in the event of failure – Evert would be able to claim that if his subordinates did not follow his instructions, he couldn't be blamed.

Perhaps in response to Evert's last-minute list of instructions, Ragosa wrote back reporting that he had visited many units in the front line:

> Accompanied by my aides, I visited five regiments and met several senior officers. I told them of their duty to ensure that the troops are in excellent condition, cheerful and fully provided with everything. The staff are working well, the general staff officers are beyond reproach; rear area units work tirelessly – everyone from generals to privates is imbued with one thought, one desire, to work not out of fear but a sense of duty, to lead us to our long-desired victory.[97]

As was almost always the case, the defenders knew that an attack was coming. It had been possible to anticipate the general area that the Russians were likely to use from the configuration of the Russian railway network; it would be impossible to mount a major assault without good railways, and there was no possibility of constructing new rail lines in the late winter. The front line trenches were very close, and the movement of troops into assembly areas could not be disguised. There was increased Russian reconnaissance activity, both on the ground and in the air, and, not for the first time, Russian signal security was weak, though an attempt was made to avoid unnecessary transmissions. Nevertheless, through a mixture of reconnaissance, wireless intercepts, reports from deserters, and the activity of Russian artillery in firing zeroing rounds at obvious objectives, the Germans knew fairly accurately when the attack would commence. On 14 March, Hoffmann noted in his diary:

> It seems that the Russians are planning an attack on our army and I am pondering whether or not we should dispatch more reserves by rail. As the chief is not here [Ludendorff was away from Kovno at the time], the decision is mine alone. On the one hand, I don't wish to show too much disquiet by sending them too soon, but on the other hand it's my responsibility to ensure that they arrive at the right time. I have prepared everything, but today I have decided to wait.[98]

The following day, Hoffmann advised Eichhorn that a Russian attack on his front was imminent.[99] At the same time, Ludendorff, who had calculated that the Russians would probably wait until the end of the spring wet season and had travelled to Berlin on family business, was hastily summoned back to the Eastern Front.[100]

The Russian attack would be against the troops of the German XXI Corps commanded by General Oskar von Hutier. When it became clear where the

Russian blow would fall, Eichhorn wasted no time in dispatching 80th Reserve Infantry Division, the only sizable formation available as an army-level reserve, to reinforce Hutier's corps. *Ober Ost* also dispatched reinforcements, extracting three divisions from other sectors and ordering them to Eichhorn's army. However, the mood in Kovno was relatively relaxed; Hoffmann's diaries contain more entries relating to political wrangling over whether or not to conduct unrestricted U-boat warfare than about the fighting in Russia.[101] In the front line, where it had been clear for several weeks that an attack was increasingly likely, the time had been put to good use, with snow cleared from trenches, additional fortifications constructed and more barbed wire positioned. Extra ammunition was issued to the infantry in excess of their normal supply, so that if it proved difficult to bring forward replenishments once the fighting began, the troops would be able to continue their resistance. The reserve formations arriving behind the front began the construction of new positions, so that even if the Russians managed to break through the main line, it would be possible to establish a new line quickly. Nevertheless, the ratio of strength was greatly to the advantage of the Russians. What would matter was whether the massed troops were used effectively.

Any remaining doubts amongst the Germans about the coming attack were dispelled on 17 March. There was a sudden increase in radio traffic, and Russian working parties could be seen removing some of the wire in front of their own trenches, in anticipation of an advance. German observers also spotted the appearance of mobile kitchen units in the front line; it was normal practice for these to be dug in some distance behind the trenches, and their presence was a further sign that the Russian troops expected to move forward. But even as the German defenders settled down late on 17 March to await the inevitable bombardment, they were surprised by a Russian attack during the night; elements of the Russian 56th Infantry Division advanced without any artillery support, perhaps hoping to overwhelm the Germans before they could respond. Instead, they were cut down in swathes by German machine-guns. Leaving many of their number lying dead in no-man's land, the Russians swiftly pulled back.[102]

Ragosa's army was deployed with a northern group consisting primarily of I and XXVII Corps, and I Siberian Corps led collectively by the latter's commander, Mikhail Mikhailovich Pleshkov, a central group with XXXIV Corps and IV Siberian Corps led by the latter's Leonid Sirelius, and a southern group with V and XXXVI Corps, III Siberian Corps and the Ural Cossack Corps under the command of the former's Petr Semenovich Baluev. The preparatory bombardment at first light on 18 March, particularly heavy in the northern sector, was one that soldiers on both sides described as the heaviest yet inflicted by the Russian Army.[103] A German officer in the southern sector later described the shelling graphically:

> In the foxholes dug deep under the breastworks, the white-faced and wide-eyed men, filled with increasing tension, listened to the growing hurricane of the artillery onslaught, which raged with a strength previously unknown in the east. The heavyweight American and Japanese shells struck particularly at the scattered concrete positions on the rear slopes south of Lake Naroch. There was a shattering series of crashes from the woods around Pronki and the lakes where the Russian shells tore apart the treetops in an attempt to destroy the German batteries and reserves. From Lake Blada, where on the wooded high hill the heavy-calibre Russian guns had been dug in, the noise thundered incessantly over the River Naroch and Lake Naroch against the flank of the 250th Regiment. Fire raged like scythes through the thorny barbed wire entanglements. Flanking batteries in Tzoroda blazed with ever greater fury against the fighting positions of the 251st Regiment in front of Mokrzyca. The strip of high ground between the swamp and the lakes seemed to have become a chain of hills spouting fire, where glowing iron rained down on the German trenches from all sides. Huge fountains of the black earth around the swampy Ladiszki stream and the light sand of the dunes rose high. The red, granite-hard frozen loam that lay amidst the sand was blown into huge blocks and rained down as great red boulders behind the trenches, landing with a crash on the melting snow. Rail-mounted guns combed the breastworks, and where the grey snow wasn't scattered, it was gradually turned black by the falling earth and smoke and fell into the trenches. The stone foundations of the Mokrzyca estate were scattered as if by an earthquake and the thick walls of packed mud from the smashed Russian villages mixed with the huge clouds of smoke.[104]

Nevertheless, when the leading elements of I Corps moved forward in the north, they found the German defences almost intact. The weather conspired against the Russian gunners throughout the battle; the ground was either frozen hard and resisted the explosions, or thawed into a sticky mud that muffled the blasts. At one location, the Germans were amazed by the sight of dense columns of Russian troops marching forward behind their skirmish line, arms sloped – their officers had assumed that the great bombardment would have destroyed all defences, and they simply had to move forward to secure their objectives.[105] Instead, their dense ranks attracted a withering fire. One of the Russian I Corps' divisions received an erroneous report that the neighbouring I Siberian Corps had already advanced, and in accordance with one of Evert's seventeen instructions, rushed forward to prevent a gap opening up between the two formations. This division also encountered intact German defences, and made no impression on them. The survivors of these attacks fell back to their starting positions at dusk, leaving thousands of dead and wounded behind.

I Siberian Corps enjoyed just as little success. When the Germans had mounted their successful attacks the previous year, they had carefully assigned different roles to their artillery – the heaviest guns were tasked with smashing fortifications, while lighter guns concentrated on Russian artillery and machine-gun positions. By contrast, I Siberian Corps' artillery was used in a more haphazard manner, with the result that the precious heavy guns bombarded targets that could easily have been neutralised by smaller weapons. At midday, the infantry advanced on a narrow front, overrunning some of the forward German trenches before coming under increasingly heavy German artillery and machine-gun fire. As the ranks melted away, German counterattacks drove the surviving elements of I Siberian Corps from the few trenches they had captured. By the end of the day, no ground had changed hands, and I Siberian Corps had lost over 3,300 men.[106] The powerful northern group of Ragosa's Second Army had achieved nothing, despite suffering terrible losses.

The southern group of forces under Baluev attacked at the same time. The artillery preparation consisted of a general bombardment of the German positions without any attempt to concentrate on specific targets, with the result that damage was modest at best. The infantry attack should have occurred at midday, but was postponed at the last minute when one of the divisions announced that it had not formed up in time. The artillery had no choice but to continue their bombardment, but had to reduce their rate of fire to conserve ammunition; finally, three hours later than planned, the barrage lifted and the infantry moved forward across the broken ground. To their dismay, they found that despite its ferocity and duration, the artillery bombardment had achieved almost nothing. The Russian troops ran into almost completely intact German barbed wire entanglements. The Germans waited until the advancing infantry reached the wire before firing, and the attack stalled in the face of the ensuing salvoes of rifle and machine-gun fire. The German artillery also opened fire on the exposed Russian troops, adding to the slaughter; part of the German preparations to defend against the attack had ensured that their guns were ranged in on all likely lines of approach that might be used by advancing Russian troops. The Russian V Corps lost over 4,000 men for no gain. The neighbouring XXXVI Corps also encountered determined resistance, but managed to secure footholds in the foremost German positions; however, the price paid – over 2,000 dead and wounded – was a heavy one for such a small gain. Matters were worsened by lack of coordination between the two Russian corps; as they failed to attack at the same time, the German artillery was able to smash first one attack, then the other.[107]

Hans Kondruss was at the time a newly promoted *Leutnant* in the German Army, and his formation had been held in reserve behind 75th Reserve Infantry Division throughout the day:

> Towards evening the enemy fire became somewhat quieter, allowing us to ascertain the situation in case of possible deployment in the German positions. At the same time, work columns strove to bring forward 'Spanish riders' [pre-assembled barbed wire obstructions] for essential reinforcement and improvement of the partly badly damaged entanglements. By the ghostly light of the constantly fired illumination rounds, I was able to get a view of the field. In any case, I had to accompany my men who were moving forward. It was a grim scene. Entire assault columns lay, or rather seemed to stand, as if they had been so determined to force a breakthrough that the dead still threatened to attack, forming grotesque heaps of corpses. The flickering light of flares gave them the illusion of sinister movement … All of us who saw these dreadful sights were certain that German soldiers could never have been made to suffer en masse like this. All of this could really only be achieved by barbaric training in blind obedience, which eliminated every independent thought. Stifled groans and tormented whimpers came from the macabre faces before us. They were just hopeless struggles against death, as any help merely meant more suffering. The dreadful horror of war clutched at our hearts with its loathsome claws … nobody said a word on the march back to our holding position … everyone was preoccupied with himself – and with thoughts that fled homewards.[108]

Even by the terrible standards of the First World War, it had been a bad day for the Russians. Ragosa's Second Army had made almost no headway at all, and had lost over 15,000 men. Artillery preparation had failed to suppress the German defences, and where sufficient guns were concentrated – as was the case in the sector of I Siberian Corps – the gains could not be exploited because the attack was on too narrow a frontage, allowing the intact German defences on either side to subject the attackers to a murderous flanking fire. As the survivors of the failed attacks huddled in their trenches during the night that followed, their misery worsened as light rain melted much of the snow, flooding the trenches; towards dawn, the sky cleared and the temperature plunged again, freezing much of the water that had poured into the trenches and had soaked the miserable Russian soldiers. Conditions were of course equally bad on the German side of the front line, but the high morale of troops who had successfully repulsed a major attack undoubtedly helped them cope better.

From the safety and comfort of his headquarters some 18 miles (30km) to the rear, Ragosa issued new orders. The artillery was to resume bombardment, but was to concentrate on specific targets and would build to a crescendo at midday for two hours on 19 March. Under cover of the barrage, the infantry would infiltrate forward and attempt to cut the German barbed wire. Then, at 2 p.m., there would be another assault. The artillery bombardment proved to be as ineffective as on the first day. Much of the heavy artillery was again wasted against inappropriate targets, and the lighter guns fired mainly shrapnel rounds rather than the high explosive required to break up the German defences. Some elements of I Corps, attempting to edge close enough to start working on the German barbed wire, were hit by their own artillery. When forward units reported that the German positions were still intact, some of the attacks were abandoned in favour of continuing artillery bombardment, but in other locations the infantry attempted to advance. By now, a widespread thaw had set in, turning the ground into a morass of mud and standing water, making any rapid movement impossible. In some locations, the infantry managed to penetrate into the German positions, but it proved almost impossible to support them effectively, leaving them vulnerable to lethal flanking fire.

I Siberian Corps postponed its assault until the onset of darkness, partly to give the artillery longer to fire on the German defences and partly in an attempt to avoid losses from German defensive fire. One of the officers who took part in the attack later described it:

> The continuous rumble of artillery, the muzzle flashes and explosions, the rattle of rifle and machine-gun fire merged into an overwhelming thunder, terrifying and awe-inspiring. Death swept the battlefield, taking his victims to right and left. The groans of the wounded, coupled with the howl of passing shots, and here and there the light of exploding grenades and shells made this terrible night truly sinister.
>
> The German artillery, silent almost all day, swept the front of the assault with fire. It seemed as if it and our own fire clashed with terrible force, trying to defeat each other.
>
> Meanwhile, the ranks moved forward slowly but steadily. The 1st Siberian Regiment trying to reach the forest via a strip of elevated ground found it especially difficult. Bullets rained down on them, and artillery crashed down on the narrow ridge.

> The fire against the front and flanks of the advancing ranks was so heavy that they stopped repeatedly before pushing forward with even greater force, taking advantage of every temporary interruption or reduction of enemy fire.
>
> The night attack was marked by the roar of gunfire and terrible losses in the ranks of the regiments, which became intermingled as they advanced, but that didn't stop them: they pressed forward stubbornly and persistently.
>
> Everyone was anxious and stressed about the prospect of this terrible battle. Sick and hoarse from talking on the phone with the division commander, we attacked with a mixture of anxiety and hope. At times it seemed as if the ranks would not survive …
>
> Finally at 1.20 a.m., the 1st Regiment requested that the artillery should move its fire forwards. It was the first news of any success. One company of the 1st Regiment had broken into the enemy trenches. By 1.45 a.m. a second company from the same regiment was also in the German trenches. Only the 3rd Regiment struggled to overcome the stubborn enemy at Buchelishki, where it was particularly difficult to advance. Only at dawn [on 20 March] when a thick fog that reduced everything to vague outlines began to clear did the 3rd Regiment seize part of the German trenches south of Buchelishki.[109]

The small foothold gained by 1st Siberian Division was the only success in the sector. However, it proved almost impossible for the Russian artillery to move on to bombard objectives deeper in the German positions, as dense fog reduced visibility to just a few yards. By contrast, the German gunners knew the precise locations of the trenches that the Russians had captured at such great cost, and put down a heavy bombardment. Requests for reinforcements went unanswered; Pleshkov – the commander of the northern group – had not positioned his reserves sufficiently close to the front line to be able to reinforce the Siberians, thus leaving them exposed and isolated. Without support on either flank and suffering increasingly heavy losses from the German artillery fire, the troops of 1st Siberian Division abandoned the trenches and pulled back to their start line.

The southern group of Second Army made a few limited attacks, but artillery preparation in this sector was hindered throughout the day by mist and fog. When the infantry attempted to advance, they came under fire, including with gas rounds. No ground was gained. Whilst losses did not reach the catastrophic levels of the first day of the offensive, they were still substantial; the northern and southern groups collectively lost a further 5,600 officers and men. It had been another day of bitter disappointment for the Russians. Once again, their artillery made little impression on the German defences, and in the one sector where the infantry managed to seize a section of German trenches, the gains were on too narrow a front to make a significant impression.

Fighting continued at a lower tempo on 20 March, but the day was marked by discussions on the Russian side on how to continue the offensive. Despite the disastrous start to the assault, Evert remained in his headquarters and made no attempt to meet Ragosa personally; similarly, Ragosa attempted to conduct the battle entirely from his position far to the rear, communicating with the assault group commanders by telephone. The contrast between the reluctance of Russian army commanders to visit the front line and the risky – almost disastrous – visit to the front line by Litzmann, Eichhorn, Prince Oskar and others is striking. Pleshkov's chief of staff told Ragosa that the men were exhausted after their futile assaults, and that it was difficult to bring forward ammunition for the artillery, but Ragosa insisted that attacks be resumed on 21 March, with I, XXVII and I Siberian Corps all attacking together. Any failure, Ragosa insisted, would be blamed upon Pleshkov and his staff.[110]

The difficulties of moving supplies – of ammunition, food and all the other paraphernalia needed for major assaults – during a time of year when the weather veered abruptly from freeze to thaw had been one of the reasons for Evert's doubts about mounting the operation, but an additional factor proved to be just as much a hindrance. Close behind the front line, West Front had massed four divisions of cavalry in preparation for exploitation of a breakthrough. This was a traditional role of cavalry, and it speaks volumes about the reluctance of Russian officers to learn from events that they continued to plan in this manner; cavalry had been almost completely ineffective in any of its expected roles since the start of the war – attempts to use mounted units to conduct raids, reconnaissance and exploitation had all yielded very poor results, yet the Russians continued to maintain large numbers of cavalry divisions. They weren't alone; the British would spend much of the year attempting to grind through the German lines on the Somme battlefield with large numbers of cavalry sitting idle in the rear areas, waiting for a breakthrough. Leaving aside the manpower tied down in formations that contributed little to the war, cavalry units were expensive to maintain. The numbers of freight trains required to transport fodder for their horses outnumbered those required to bring up supplies for their men, adding enormously to the already difficult supply problems faced by West Front's logistics officers. Attempts by cavalrymen to exercise their horses added to the degradation of roads, and throughout the Naroch operation there were incidents where the commanders of cavalry divisions simply appropriated supplies that had been intended for the hard-pressed infantry in the front line. Even the very presence of such large numbers of horsemen created difficulties, hugely hindering attempts to bring forward supplies and infantry reinforcements.

On 21 March, the two depleted divisions of I Corps – collectively, they had lost nearly 8,000 men in the battle to date – moved forward through falling snow. The weather prevented any observation of the German positions, but there must have been widespread relief when it was found that the artillery bombardment had finally created some gaps in the German wire. Despite sustaining further casualties from defensive fire, the Russian infantry penetrated into the German trenches; on this occasion, the Russians had made use of a tactic widely seen on the Western Front, moving their artillery fire forward to give the impression that an infantry attack was about to begin, then bombarding the front line again and thus catching any defenders that had manned the parapet in preparation.[111] Finally forced to abandon their front line positions, the Germans fell back generally in good order, setting off pre-positioned explosive charges that allowed melt-water from the numerous streams to flood into the trenches. Some German units, however, were badly disrupted. The exhausted Russians now found themselves waist-deep in freezing, muddy water, but showed great determination in attacking to left and right to widen their penetration. After so many failed attempts, the Russian infantry in both the northern and southern groups succeeded in securing the German front line, and managed to beat off counterattacks. However, attempts to move further Russian troops forward as reinforcements resulted in heavy German artillery fire that tore huge holes in the ranks. As a consequence, one of the Russian formations from I Corps – 22nd Infantry Division – was ultimately forced to retreat to its start line after dusk. It had attacked with some 5,500 men; barely 1,000 remained to pull back in defeat.[112] The troops of 1st Siberian Division also had to abandon their gains; in their case, a regiment was available as corps reserve to help them with a further assault, but this attack was abandoned when the division and corps artillery reported that they had no ammunition to support the infantry.

Hans Kondruss moved forward during the evening with orders to take up positions in the secondary line of defence in the northern sector. Here, he was to stop any troops retreating from the main position, incorporate them into his unit, and then hold the line against further Russian attacks:

> The 'Friemel Heights' position consisted of only shallow trenches with an almost improvised wire entanglement and two dugouts, with a four-sided concrete

> position about 3m by 4m reinforced by three or four iron rails. One dugout was designated for the signals platoon, the other for the medics. Communications with rear area command posts was of the greatest importance for the artillery, but setting up an aid station for our wounded comrades was something close to our hearts. We tried as energetically as possible to improve the trenches in ground that was frozen to a depth of up to a metre, to provide shelter against the ever-stronger artillery fire. But there was only harassing fire in our sector, as the Russians were apparently bringing their guns forward in order to bring our improvised positions under effective fire. In the meantime the men were reorganised to bring order to the confusion. Two heavy machine-gun squads arrived.
>
> At 11 p.m. I was able to report to the commander that the defences were ready. He came forward with von Wunsch [Kondruss' immediate superior and close friend] to take note of any important concerns. The most important issue was contact with command posts to the rear. The telephone was particularly problematic, as there was still no wireless communication and the line to the rear was very quickly severed, even by ordinary harassing fire. The linesmen had an unenviable role, and performed heroic deeds in their own fashion without the use of weapons, particularly when working close to the positions themselves.
>
> We were on a ridge, which amounted to high ground in the almost flat landscape. The Friemel Heights were apparently named … after the pioneer officer who was tasked with the construction of the position, which was actually incomplete. The extent of the trench that was to be used in active defence amounted to about 400m. It was flanked on either side by swamp, which was really no obstacle in winter, but at this time was under a metre of snow. The construction of positions here was impossible, giving no advantage to attackers or defenders. The 'dead horse', whose frozen limbs served as boundary posts, marked our right boundary.[113]

By 22 March, both sides were utterly exhausted by the heavy fighting of the preceding days. Nevertheless, they attempted to make further progress in the northern sector throughout the preceding night, where the German artillery added to the problems of the defenders, as Kondruss later recalled:

> Shortly after 11 p.m. the Russians began to fire, and at 11.30 p.m. this increased, intensified in error by our own artillery, based upon the erroneous report of an unfortunate *Hauptmann* who apparently ran to the rear in soaking clothing after being thrown into a crater that was full of water (he was from one of the units that had been overrun and seemed to have been scattered to the four winds) and who

believed that the Russians were already on the Friemel Heights. The explosions confirmed the dreadful conclusion that had been reached. Hauptmann von Olberg crossed the fire zone walking upright with exemplary composure to try to get the German artillery commander whose B-position was located immediately next to the battalion headquarters to order a cessation of firing. I can still see Olberg in his highly visible high-collared coat moving without any haste and spreading calm to everyone. Unfortunately, he could not get them to stop firing and Wunsch jumped down to my side.

We stood together on the step that led to the signals section. I placed my arm on his shoulder. We knew well that death was only a glance away. Our inner strength was steadily being eroded. We drank neat rum, which had been brought forward in plentiful amounts in order to endure the bitterly cold night. Our coats were frozen as stiff as wood by the time the first rays of the rising sun banished the cold stars. But the rum also helped calm our inner fears. We had been told at school how the Russians had tried to stiffen the resistance of their soldiers against the superior forces led by Old Fritz in the Battle of Zorndorf [in 1758, when Frederick the Great overcame a Russian army led by Villim Fermor] with vodka. At the time, I had never imagined that at some point I would be in the same position.

Whereas the Russian shells often had defective explosive mechanisms, our 100mm howitzer rounds were utterly murderous. We barely had time to crouch down before the incoming rounds arrived, and we all stood silently – each preoccupied with his thoughts – throughout the ongoing hell. Suddenly, Wunsch collapsed and fell back over my arm down the steps before I could really grasp what was happening. It was a terrible shock when the fearful truth dawned. I saw my dear friend lying dead at my feet. A shell fragment the size of a bean had penetrated close to his eyes and exited the back of his head leaving a fist-sized hole, from which oozed blood and tissue. The sight of blood shocked me and I sank down next to him and for a short time lost awareness of what was happening, so my fellow Kirchof thought that I too had been hit. The enemy fire intensified to a level that we had never before experienced in Russia. It concentrated mainly on the Friemel Heights and at 4 p.m. developed into proper drumfire. As later reports stated, artillery command was in the hands of French officers [this is not mentioned in Russian sources] … Luckily for us the Russian ammunition was not as good as that of the Germans or French. Also, the Russians were unable to silence our defensive batteries, which were therefore able to give us effective fire support. Suddenly at 5 p.m., at dusk, the enemy fire almost completely stopped. We naturally assumed that the enemy infantry would now advance. Our losses were very high, with 100 dead in our sector alone. Amongst them my dear friend

[Wunsch] took a direct hit from one of the last shells, which tore him beyond recognition. It was only from his wristwatch, which I had given him, that I recognised him from the horrific mix of blood, mud and dismembered body parts that the medics carried past on a canvas stretcher, my so true comrade. A few days later, his Iron Cross, for which I had nominated him after Kalvaria [in southern Poland], arrived. All we could do was to send it together with our condolences to his wife and small children. But what little consolation was that!

We expected the Russians to overrun us with ease. Several machine-guns were out of action, three had been completely destroyed. We did what we could to rebuild the shattered trenches. Everywhere, we came across the dead and badly wounded. In any event, we prepared everything we could that had to be destroyed before the enemy arrived – briefcases, pistols, binoculars, etc. But we waited in vain: the Russians didn't appear! As we later learned from prisoners, the Russians had seen movements in our trenches and decided to wait until morning. We used the intervening time busily. Replacements arrived, three of the knocked-out machine-guns were restored to service. And in view of the delicate mechanism of the old heavy machine-guns, that was no easy task … another machine-gun platoon was deployed, giving us seven heavy machine-guns.

Amongst the replacements was an energetic *Oberleutnant*, Freiherr von Plutowski, who was to take over the entire sector as the most senior present. As I wished to brief him, together with the machine-gun leader, who I had known for some time, and we had to take shelter in the trenches against incoming harassing fire, we had to lean against bloodied corpses. Even death had lost its horror after our close acquaintance with it. But for Herr von Plutowski, this was unpleasant. A shrapnel round exploding above us sprayed its lead pellets over us. One struck Plutowski, another the machine-gun officer. Fortunately, both could be taken to the field dressing station in the aid centre immediately …

With Oberleutnant von Plutowski knocked out it was necessary for me to take command of the entire sector … Without any further preparatory fire, the Russians advanced at 4 a.m. [it was German practice in both World Wars to operate on German time, so this attack happened at about 7 a.m. local time] in formed-up columns. The familiar, hoarse and wild 'Urra! Urra!' of the Russians, seemingly coming from thousands of throats, banished all fatigue, and replaced it with tenseness and determination to resist. I had ordered all weapons to open fire when the Russians were only 400m away – there wasn't a single shot from either side – waiting for a flare to signal suppressing fire across the foreground, and I was able to stand unharmed on the firestep and watch the enemy assault columns through binoculars. The attack wave moved through the dim light like

> a broad wall of clay, a huge landslide. Ever more animated shouts of 'Urra!' resounded, ever more clearly one could see them rushing forward in their fur hats. Our silence seemed to unsettle them, their advance grew more uncertain. The unholy scene before me raised indescribable feelings in me, which I could only suppress by summoning forth the last of my strength. But knowing that everything possible had been done during the night to prepare a hot welcome for the attack, and an awareness that a great deal – almost everything – depended upon our ability to resist, gave us the necessary strength to hold on. Once more the shouts of 'Urra! Urra!' swept towards us with raw energy – and then it began! 'Free fire!' – and abruptly the attack wave fell silent, and very soon uttered heartrending screams. Column after column pressed forward over the dead, the oncoming mass of humanity seemed uncountable. But then everything dissolved into a wild retreat that was brought under effective fire by our guns … the remnants of the Russian attack columns pulled back to their start line, i.e. the trenches of our 75th Reserve Infantry Division that they had captured on 20 March.[114]

The Russians were able to make some modest gains at a few locations, but Evert was beginning to doubt the entire operation. He sent a signal to Alexeyev, but the reply merely criticised how Ragosa had conducted the assault:

> I fully understand that it is difficult to abandon a planned operation, but situations often change … I repeat my personal opinion about the need to abandon the use of group commanders and for the army commander to take personal control.[115]

Accordingly, Evert sent a telegram to Ragosa on 23 March ordering him to take personal command of the Pleshkov group. Ragosa was not enthusiastic, complaining that he was needed in his headquarters to deal with the daily flow of messages. Whilst this may conform with the stereotype of First World War senior commanders who were reluctant to abandon the comforts of their headquarters for the more unpleasant conditions of the front line, it is worth pointing out that some Russian generals were criticised in the opening months of the war for spending too much of their time dealing with minutiae of their command near the front, rather than coordinating matters from their headquarters. Also, Alexeyev had replaced the almost complete neglect of detail by Grand Duke Nikolai with a policy of sending out large volumes of messages, all of which required attention and responses. In any event, Ragosa informed Evert that he no longer believed that Pleshkov's group could achieve a breakthrough; instead, he wished to switch the focus of the attack to Leonid Sirelius' central group, which had been doing little more than trying to keep the opposing German forces from moving to the flanks. When he discovered that Pleshkov had issued fresh orders for a resumption of attacks, Ragosa overruled his subordinate at almost the last moment. Whilst the exhausted and battered front line troops probably welcomed the respite, Pleshkov took it as a personal criticism, resulting in a bitter exchange between his headquarters and Ragosa's staff. The issue was not resolved, and Pleshkov grimly issued orders for another attack, across the same corpse-strewn ground that had already claimed so many lives. To make matters worse, a local German counterattack succeeded in recapturing many of the trenches that had been won at such a high cost.

Early on 24 March, the southern group launched further attacks with V Corps and III Siberian Corps. Whilst the former made some progress, capturing further stretches of German trenches, III Siberian Corps on the northern flank of the attack was unable to penetrate the German barbed wire, and as another widespread thaw set in, the survivors withdrew to the start line. Many reported that their guns were so caked in mud as to be inoperable, and the artillery in its sodden emplacements had barely enough shells left to use against any German counterattack. This shortage forced another attempt, planned for the evening of 26 March, to be abandoned. Indeed, the Germans chose that very moment to launch their own assault, driving III Siberian Corps out of some of the few trenches that it had captured. In driving rain, the two sides slogged it out at close range, struggling as much against the mud and water as each other, before the Germans pulled back. Baluev's exhausted troops continued to throw themselves at the Germans in the days that followed, for very little gain. From his distant headquarters, Ragosa raged at Baluev, ordering him to secure a low ridge in the heart of the German defences 'at all costs'. The ridge was hardly a vital geographical location, and in any case proved impossible to capture. As the fighting died down, Baluev's shattered formations were left to count the cost of their commanders' intransigence and inflexibility.[116]

In the north, it proved almost impossible for Pleshkov's group to launch their new attack. The artillery had almost exhausted its ammunition, particularly for the vital heavy guns, and without an adequate bombardment there was no prospect whatever of success. The assault was postponed several times, and finally took place before dawn on 26 March. At first, the advancing infantry appeared to make good progress and secured several stretches of the German forward trenches before running out of steam and being forced to retreat under heavy fire.

The row between Pleshkov and Ragosa now erupted in full strength. When the acting commander of Second Army made no secret of his belief that Pleshkov was, in his opinion, 'militarily illiterate', Pleshkov responded with an angry signal pointing out that nobody had criticised his command in such terms before. Ragosa was unrepentant. Whatever his achievements in the past, Pleshkov had failed to show adequate leadership on this occasion. But regardless of how Ragosa and Pleshkov attempted to blame each other for the disastrous conduct of the battle, the reality was that the forces that had been assembled were exhausted and there was absolutely no prospect of any sort of success. On 29 March, Alexeyev ordered a cessation of major assaults and told local commanders that they should use their discretion about limited local attacks to improve their positions but should do no more than that. Ragosa immediately ordered the disbandment of the Pleshkov group and the withdrawal of XXVII Corps. Despite his criticisms, however, Ragosa was unable to secure the dismissal of Pleshkov from command of I Siberian Corps. Instead, he now returned to Fourth Army when Smirnov, apparently recovered from illness, returned to resume command of Second Army. It had been an ignominious period of command for Ragosa. It was estimated that the fighting cost Second Army a staggering 78,000 casualties, or just over 30 per cent of its entire strength; Pleshkov's group lost over half the men with which it started the battle.[117] As they cleared the battlefield, the Germans counted over 5,000 Russian corpses left hanging on the barbed wire entanglements.[118] Some estimates placed Russian losses even higher, exceeding 120,000 if casualties in fighting further north were added to the figure. In some areas in the south, Baluev's men had succeeded in advancing perhaps 2 miles (3km). German casualties for the entire battle amounted to no more than 20,000 at the very most, again if losses along the entire front were taken into account.[119]

Like all who fought at Lake Naroch – and indeed in any battle in this terrible war – Hans Kondruss was left to mourn many dead comrades, particularly his dear friend Wunsch. His commander consoled him:

> When I reported to my commander, he understood me very well when I said to him that the hardest of all the deaths for me was our dear von Wunsch. With fatherly warmth, he said to me, 'My dear Kondruss, it seems as if you are destined to have to face such dire situations repeatedly. But it may give you some consolation that we all know what thanks we owe for your actions!' This moment stands as one of the most prominent in my life. Yet it had nothing to do with so-called courage! Our hearts were constantly pounding! Only our

> commitment and our conscience in fulfilling our duty kept us upright – wherever our fate sent us.[120]

The Naroch front was not the only point at which the Russians attempted to exert pressure on the German Army. The terrain along the northern sector of the Eastern Front was, like much of the European parts of the tsar's empire, a mixture of forests and swamps. When Russia's railways were built, the railway engineers chose areas where these forests and swamps were crossed by firmer ground, often in the form of low hills. This allowed the armies on either side to anticipate with some accuracy where attacks were likely, particularly during the wet seasons – the firm ground was effectively the only point at which infantry could move with any confidence and supplies could be brought forward to sustain an advance, and of course the configuration of the railways meant that these were the points at which it was easiest to concentrate resources. One such location was in Latvia to the southeast of Riga, and as early as February the Germans detected the arrival of substantial Russian forces, with elements of XXXVIII Corps and all of III Corps forming up. By mid-March, they had been joined by XXI Corps and part of V Siberian Corps.[121] The assessment in *Ober Ost* and the headquarters of the German Eighth Army was that these forces were not intended to strike a decisive blow against the German line; the main effort was to be further south, at Lake Naroch, and once a breakthrough had been achieved there, these troops in the north would attack to pin down the Germans and prevent their withdrawal while Ragosa turned north to overwhelm them from the rear.

On 21 March, while the soldiers of the Russian Second Army continued to struggle forward to die on the German wire, Russian guns opened fire along almost the entire front of the German Eighth Army along the River Daugava. Near Mitau (now Jelgava), the Russians attacked through a dense forest, a former royal hunting estate. Amidst the splintered trees, the assault formations lost cohesion and the attack foundered in the face of determined infantry and artillery fire. As was the case in the attacks near Lake Naroch, the Russians managed to overrun a few German trenches at enormous cost, but were unable to hold on to their gains. Within a day, the front line stabilised. Whether the Russian attack had been intended as an attempt to help the Naroch offensive, or as a response to the French appeal for help, or as part of the overall strategy of attrition against Germany, it failed completely. Russian losses of over 21,000 far exceeded those of the Germans.[122]

It was time for both sides to start drawing conclusions from the battle, now that it had ended, in Ludendorff's words, 'in mud and blood'.[123] The Russian high command ordered that a commission should draw up a report on the disastrous fighting, but immediately ran into difficulties. Smirnov, who had been absent throughout the fighting, objected to his army being the subject of such attention, and demanded that the enquiry should be carried out internally by his staff. To add to the irritation of his superiors, he also requested that several of his officers – including, most controversially, Pleshkov – should be awarded decorations in recognition of the sacrifices made by their men. After some discussion, it was agreed that the commission would confine itself to looking at the Pleshkov group, while Smirnov would organise an enquiry by Second Army staff to look at the performance of the entire army.

The staff of the Russian Artillery Inspectorate played a major role in the enquiry. One of their officers, Colonel Gripenberg, was particularly vehement in who was not to blame: the soldiers who struggled through the mud and snow to die in such large numbers. The higher one looked in the chain of command, he wrote, the greater the degree of culpability:

> The troops, who deserve great respect, are far less worthy of blame … when they secured a foothold they held on, come what may. The troops were knee-deep in water, and in order to rest they had to pile up the German corpses and sit on them, as the trenches were full of water. The wounded and mutilated tried to crawl to safety, groaning with pain.[124]

Artillery command and coordination was poor by any standard – it was as if such things were regarded as of little importance compared to getting sufficient shells per gun. There was almost no meaningful reconnaissance by the gunners; they were assigned targets on maps, and accepted them without attempting to study them by visiting the front line. To make matters worse, personal rivalries did not help, as was so often the case in the Russian Army. Pleshkov's heavy guns were commanded by one man (General Zakutovsky), while Prince Masalsky, who was usually in charge of I Corps' guns, commanded the rest of the artillery. The two men did not show any inclination to cooperate with each other, each resenting and coveting the other's role, and refused to share ammunition on those occasions when they both had guns of similar calibre. Many batteries did not take up position until immediately before the battle, and had not zeroed their guns on their objectives. In many cases, no clear objectives were set, and the artillery simply bombarded large areas indiscriminately; on other occasions, guns were set unrealistic objectives. Gripenberg's report described how a battery of four light howitzers had been ordered to destroy nearly a kilometre of German barbed wire, a task that required a far larger number of heavier guns.

None of those in higher authority came out of the battle with any credit. Evert was perhaps the only individual who questioned the wisdom of attacking at such a difficult time of year, but then allowed himself to be persuaded by Alexeyev and spent much of the battle passing instructions on without comment. Ragosa showed no ability to control Second Army, delegating all decision-making to his three group commanders and then limiting himself to repeating the same instructions to attack at all costs – his failure to control his artillery, the repeated attacks at the same points, and the lack of coordination between artillery and infantry resulting in casualties from 'friendly fire' were precisely the problems that Shcherbachev had highlighted in his report earlier in the year. Pleshkov behaved with a mixture of obstinate rigidity and indecision; on the one hand, he repeatedly ordered the same units to throw themselves at the same objectives, but on the other hand, he cancelled orders at the last moment on more than one occasion. Despite these criticisms, Smirnov's recommendation of recognition for Pleshkov resulted in the latter being awarded the Order of St. Alexander Nevsky with Swords.[125] Created by Catherine the Great, this was a medal named after the famous medieval prince of Novgorod who defeated an invasion by the Teutonic Knights, and was given to Russian citizens who had distinguished themselves in defending Mother Russia against invaders. It is hard to see how such a description could be applied to Pleshkov.

All officers involved attempted to blame others. Knox spoke to many of those involved, and concluded that Alexeyev had felt obliged to attack in order to help the French. Evert's staff agreed with this assessment, but added that Alexeyev should bear much of the blame for not having insisted on waiting until a better season for the attack. Ragosa told Knox that he had been paralysed by a constant bombardment of messages from Evert and Alexeyev, receiving and sending up to 3,000 signals per day from his headquarters. In many cases, he had had to pass on queries to his subordinates, adding to their work and then having to collate their replies before sending them back up the chain of command. Baluev felt that he had been forced by his seniors to attack across unfavourable ground, resulting in his not being able to support those parts of his force that actually achieved some initial successes.[126]

The effect of the battle on the morale of the Russian rank and file was severe, particularly as it came so soon after the disastrous attempts to drive back the Austro-Hungarian forces in eastern Galicia. Throughout most of 1915, the army had endured one setback after another and had been forced to retreat across Russian-occupied Poland into the territory of Russia itself. The last battles of the year to the south of the great Pripet Marshes, when the Russians successfully crushed Conrad's Black-Yellow Offensive, had gone some way to restoring confidence and self-belief, as had a steady flow of new recruits and a progressive improvement in the supply of weapons and ammunition. Now, confidence plunged again, as did belief in the high command, particularly amongst the many *Opolchenie* who resented being sent to the front line. As had been the case on almost every occasion, there was widespread criticism of the supply of artillery ammunition; even greater quantities would be needed, argued the gunners, if any attack was going to succeed. They pointed to the vastly greater use of artillery on the Western Front, ignoring the fact that even there, sheer weight of artillery bombardment had failed to achieve a breakthrough. However, out of the wreckage came the beginning of understanding: fixing the supply of rifles, or artillery ammunition, or any individual component was not enough. The entire way in which the Russian Army fought would have to change if success was to be achieved.

The only military figure who was dismissed at the time of the debacle was a man who had no direct involvement with the operation: Alexei Andreyevich Polivanov, the war minister, received a letter in late March from the tsar telling him that he was being replaced. Polivanov had taken up his post following the dismissal the previous year of Vladimir Sukhomlinov, the veteran schemer who had in many respects perfected the principles of divide and rule that dominated the Russian military hierarchy, but early on during his tenure Polivanov had offended the tsar by questioning the role of Tsarina Alexandra as regent while Nicholas was commanding *Stavka*. He had further alienated potential supporters by allowing his military industrial committees to grow out of all proportion, accumulating no fewer than sixty-eight sub-committees; they were widely regarded as a haven for those with influence who wished to evade service in the army. However, his fall was – as was almost inevitably the case in the closing years of tsarist rule – the result of a complex series of personal and political interactions.

There was huge dissatisfaction in the Duma and elsewhere with the open corruption and abuse of office by Prime Minister Stürmer, even amongst former allies like Alexander Alexeyevich Khvostov, currently serving as minister of the interior. Khvostov had sought the office of prime minister for himself, but was deeply angered when Stürmer – with the backing of Rasputin and, therefore, Tsarina Alexandra – was appointed. Khvostov then started to plot the assassination of Rasputin, but showed singularly poor judgement in selecting co-conspirators, with farcical consequences. One member of the plot was Ivan Manasevich-Manuilov, an inveterate plotter who had a long history of multiple betrayals. Another, Boris Rzhevsky, was arrested as part of the almost open feud between Stürmer and Khvostov, and a police search of his apartment uncovered numerous documents that incriminated Khvostov in several illegal activities, including the plot to kill Rasputin. A third conspirator procured poison, but succeeded only in killing Rasputin's cat. In any event, Tsarina Alexandra had already learned of the plot, and demanded military protection for the self-styled holy man.

Events were now moving rapidly against Khvostov. Stepan Beletsky, the chief of police in Petrograd, had been appointed by Khvostov but concluded that attempting to oppose both Stürmer and Rasputin was a policy doomed to failure, and therefore decided to turn his back on his former patron and to ally himself with the prime minister. The financial newspaper, *Birzhevye Vedomosti*, published interviews with him that implicated Khvostov in several criminal acts.[127] Perhaps influenced by his wife, Tsar Nicholas had already decided to dismiss Khvostov; whilst this might have been a reasonable move, what followed was disastrous. In addition to his duties as prime minister, Stürmer was now appointed as minister of the interior too, in place of the disgraced Khvostov. The result was that any relief in the Duma about the dismissal of Khvostov was outweighed by the dismay at Stürmer gaining even more power.

Characteristically, one of Stürmer's first acts was to grant himself a secret fund of five million roubles, in a typically underhand manner that inadvertently started the cascade of events that led to Polivanov's dismissal. Every meeting of the Council of Ministers concluded with a bundle of documents being signed by all those present; these were draft proposals that had been discussed during the meeting and were mechanically signed by those attending the meeting, and Stürmer simply added the authorisation of his new payment to this stack of documents. Count Pavel Nikolayevich Ignatiev, the minister of education, happened to glance through the document authorising the payment to Stürmer. The funds that Stürmer had awarded himself were from the budget of the war ministry, and Ignatiev immediately drew the document to the attention of War Minister Polivanov, who demanded a justification from Stürmer. The response was utterly unconvincing: the money was required for ill-defined espionage services, Stürmer explained in a disjointed manner, and would be used to pay for something that had been requested by the tsar himself. Polivanov rejected this out of hand – even if it were true, it was not the correct way to allocate funding.

Knowing that Stürmer enjoyed the protection of Rasputin and the personal support of the royal couple, Polivanov guessed that there would be serious consequences of his blocking of the prime minister.[128] Alexandra had earned the hostility of many with Russia's political establishment for her constant haranguing of the tsar with advice on how to conduct affairs, and this occasion was no exception. She had written to her husband in January urging him to dismiss Polivanov on the grounds that he was a revolutionist, and continued her prompting in March. The tone of her letter is typical of the exchanges between the two:

> Lovy mine, don't dawdle, make up your mind, it's far too serious, and changing him at once, you cut the wings of that revolutionary party; only be quicker about it – you know, you yourself long ago wanted to change him – hurry up Sweetheart, you need Wify to be behind pushing you.[129]

Within days, Polivanov received the letter advising him of his dismissal. There was no mention of the sterling work that he had done to rebuild Russia's armies after the disasters of 1915. Instead, there was only criticism:

> The activities of the war industries committees do not inspire me with confidence, and I find your supervision of them to be insufficiently assertive.[130]

Whilst the proliferation of the committees had led to widespread criticism, it seems a relatively small misdemeanour compared to Stürmer's misappropriation of funds or hundreds of other crimes committed by the circle of men whose misconduct did so much to cause widespread dissatisfaction. However, the war industries committees contained large numbers of those whom the tsar regarded as his enemies – liberals and industrialists who expected a far greater say in the running of Russia in the future. Many of these industrialists were based in Moscow, and resented the manner in which all military contracts were preferentially given to firms in Petrograd, not least because the owners of those firms were in a position to lobby the royal family for support. By acting against Polivanov, Tsar Nicholas probably felt that he was strengthening his position. His letters to the tsarina contain repeated mentions of other senior Russian figures expressing their approval of the dismissal of Polivanov; it is likely that they told the tsar what they thought he expected to hear.

Polivanov's replacement was Dmitri Savelyevich Shuvayev, who was regarded as an apolitical logistics expert. Knox met him a month later:

> The minister … commenced with a little speech about himself. He had served in all three arms, commencing as an infantry officer, serving in the artillery for two and a half years and commanding a Cossack cavalry school for fifteen years. He had commanded a division and a corps, when the tsar suddenly called him to be Chief Intendant [senior supply officer]. He had no knowledge of the work, but his devotion to the tsar was such that if the door were to open and His Majesty were to come into the room and ask him to throw himself out of the window, he would do so at once … he had done his best as Chief Intendant and was supposed to have made a success of it, especially in the suppression of corruption.[131]

Again, Tsar Nicholas wrote to Alexandra to tell her that many figures were delighted with the new appointment; this contrasts with the glum views of foreign officials such as Knox and Paléologue. The latter's diary is revealing, not least for its insight into how the tsar had inadvertently removed one of the few men with the reputation and personal authority to be able to prevent the slide towards revolution:

> General Polivanov, the War Minister, has been relieved of his functions and replaced by General Shuvayev, a man of mean intelligence.
>
> General Polivanov's dismissal is a serious loss to the Alliance. So far as was possible, he had restored system and order in the War Department, and made good – so far as could be made good – the mistakes, omissions, waste and betrayals of his predecessor, General Sukhomlinov. He was not only an excellent administrator, as methodical and ingenious as upright and vigilant, but possessed the strategic sense in a very high degree: General Alexeyev does not like taking advice from anyone, but he attached great importance to his.
>
> Though his loyalty is unimpeachable, he is a man of liberal opinions, and has many friends in the Duma and the ranks of the Octobrists and Cadets, who founded great hopes upon him. He seemed to be a last line of defence of the existing regime, capable of protecting it both against the extravagances of absolutism and the excesses of revolution.[132]

The Germans drew their own conclusions from the fighting at Lake Naroch. One observer remarked how when the crisis of the assaults had passed and XXI Corps had an opportunity to rotate troops out of the front line, the men marching away from the trenches sang triumphantly.[133] In the west, the French were adopting a motto at Verdun: '*Ils ne passeront pas.*' ('They shall not pass.') The Germans near Lake Naroch had their own version: '*Haltet aus! Lasst hoch* *das Banner wehn! Keinen Schritt zurück!*'[134] ('Hold out! Let the flag fly high! Not one step back!') Just as the battle had a hugely negative impact on Russian morale, it boosted that of the German forces, much as the January fighting had led to soaring morale amongst Austro-Hungarian units in eastern Galicia and along the Strypa front. At higher levels, there was also great satisfaction at the conduct of the defence. The Russians had failed to make any meaningful impression, and their modest territorial gains against Below's forces in the north were reversed in a successful counterattack in early April. There had been no need to transfer forces from the west, and the strategic intention of the Russians – to divert German attention away from Verdun – had unquestionably failed. It seemed to all senior officers of the Central Powers that their positions along the Eastern Front could be expected to look after themselves for the foreseeable future. The Russian Army would not apparently pose a meaningful threat, and both Germany and Austria-Hungary could pursue their aims elsewhere.

CHAPTER 4

THE QUIET FRONT

The bodies were dragged away from the chewed-up strip of no-man's land near Lake Naroch and buried. The Germans noted that they had already cleared their own dead, and many of the fallen Russians, before their enemies ventured out, in some cases arranging a local ceasefire.[135] For long weeks, the remnants of the Russian regiments languished in their muddy trenches, while the Germans industriously repaired the damage done by Russian guns and strengthened their positions further. In April, the Germans recovered the last sections of their former front line that had been captured on the Daugava front. The attack was notable for the first major use of new artillery tactics devised by Georg Bruchmüller, a German artillery commander who abandoned the traditional heavy bombardment in favour of shorter, more intense, and more targeted attacks that were designed not only to inflict physical damage on the enemy front line, but also to disrupt communications, command centres, and the movement of reinforcements. He also further refined early experiments with the use of rolling barrages behind which attacking infantry might be able to advance with some degree of protection. The success of the German attack was widely regarded as being largely due to this new use of artillery; this development did not go unnoticed on the Russian side.

Apart from that attack, there was little sign of the Central Powers making any attempt to assert themselves. In keeping with Falkenhayn's strategy, the Eastern Front would be kept as quiet as possible while the French were ground down at Verdun. Ludendorff, Hoffmann and others in *Ober Ost* could complain as much as they liked that they could achieve great successes, if only they were given a relatively small number of troops; for the moment, such troops remained on the Western Front. Nor was there any intention on the part of the *k.u.k.* Army to mount any major operations against Russia. Conrad was preparing his assault against Italy, moving troops into position in the Alps.

In Russia, there was widespread despondency and pessimism. The government headed by Goremykin, the previous prime minister, had been derided by Guchkov, the leader of the Octobrists, as a 'regime of favourites, sorcerers and buffoons'; their replacement by Stürmer's corrupt associates led to widespread disillusionment with the existing regime and deep pessimism about any prospects for reform.[136] With Stürmer apparently secure in his office, the political opposition was temporarily quiet, but more because there were no clear opportunities available than any acceptance of the status quo. Ordinary people tried to get on with their lives, but there was growing hardship. Accommodation for industrial workers had long been a cause of concern even before the war, and the huge increase in war industry did nothing to improve matters; each year saw the number of industrial workers in Moscow increase by 10 per cent, and in Petrograd by 20 per cent. Although there was plentiful grain being produced, heavy-handed government attempts to fix prices resulted in large stockpiles being hoarded in the countryside, creating serious shortages in the cities with their swollen populations. Although many of the tens of thousands of prisoners of war held by Russia were put to work in the mines and countryside, manpower shortages remained a serious problem, resulting in calls for even longer working hours in factories; this in turn fed the growing sense of unrest. Women were employed in numbers undreamt of in peacetime, as was the case elsewhere in Europe, and augmented the already large number of workers who were single, without any dependents, and were open to the ideas of those who fomented revolution.

As the *rasputitsa* – the weeks of mud associated with both spring and autumn – began in earnest, any prospect of either side resuming major hostilities disappeared entirely, and the Russians took the opportunity to make further changes in their command structure. Nikolai Ivanov had commanded Southwest Front since the beginning of the war, leading it first to victory over the Austro-Hungarian forces in Galicia and then into a protracted and hugely costly battle of attrition in the Carpathians during the first winter of the war. Despite his failure to deliver on his promise to invade the Hungarian plain, capture Budapest and force the Hungarian parliament to accept a separate peace, he had remained in command during the months that Mackensen drove the Russian armies back from one line to the next, recapturing most of Galicia before turning north and driving the Russians out of Poland completely. During much of 1915, he had appeared to be overwhelmed by pessimism, simply passing instructions from *Stavka* down to his army commanders, but he managed to stay in command until he was able to stop

Conrad's Black-Yellow Offensive in the autumn. However, any credibility that he might have recovered from that success was then squandered by the failure of the Czernowitz and Strypa attacks, and Alexeyev, who had been pressing for his removal since becoming Tsar Nicholas' chief of staff, was finally able to prevail.

At the beginning of the war, Alexeyev had been Ivanov's chief of staff, and the two men had clashed repeatedly. Ivanov was seen as part of the grouping within the army that was led by War Minister Sukhomlinov, whereas Alexeyev represented the opposing camp of conservative generals who clustered around the tsar. Regardless of Ivanov's failures, it was therefore almost inevitable that Alexeyev would try to have him replaced, but it is a tribute to Ivanov's personal political skills that despite being a member of the Sukhomlinov camp, he managed to exploit his longstanding personal loyalty to the tsar to evade sanction for his failures for so long, even after Sukhomlinov was dismissed in the summer of 1915. In the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War, Ivanov had played a leading role in suppressing dissent in the Kronstadt garrison just outside St Petersburg, and during the second winter of the war he campaigned to have the tsar awarded the Order of St George for having witnessed an artillery bombardment in the front line. Many officers including Brusilov refused to have any part in this, but eventually Ivanov managed to arrange for Nicholas to be awarded the medal. This may have earned him a brief stay of execution, but the tide was strongly against him. Many front line soldiers felt that he was too distant from their units, rarely visiting them; Brusilov later wrote that Ivanov only visited his army once from the beginning of the war until he was dismissed, and then stayed only for a few hours, visiting four battalions and then departing back to his distant headquarters.[137]

Brusilov had spent most of the winter improving the training and preparation of his Eighth Army, turning the raw replacement drafts into usable soldiers and improving field positions. He then received a telegram from Alexeyev, notifying him that he had been appointed commander of Southwest Front in place of Ivanov; his chief of staff in his new post would be Vladislav Napoleonovich Klembovsky. Brusilov immediately asked who would command Eighth Army in his place, and was disappointed to learn that it would be Alexei Maximovich Kaledin, who had shown some promise as the commander of a cavalry division at the beginning of the war but had then failed to impress Brusilov when temporarily assigned to command an infantry corps.

The telegram informing Brusilov of his new appointment also advised him that the tsar would be visiting Kamanets-Podolsk on 6 April, and Brusilov should meet him there. It was therefore expedient for the new commander of

Southwest Front to proceed to his new headquarters as quickly as possible so that he could become acquainted with his role before meeting the tsar. However, a second telegram arrived almost immediately, from Mikhail Konstantinovich Diterikhs, the quartermaster-general of Southwest Front, asking Brusilov to delay his arrival; the reason given was that this would avoid unnecessary embarrassment for Ivanov, and went on to hint that the tsar wished Ivanov to remain in the area in anticipation of a new appointment. This put Brusilov in an awkward position, and he wrote to Alexeyev asking for direction. The reply he received was diplomatic: Brusilov should avoid embarrassing Ivanov and should stay away for the moment, but was at liberty to summon senior officers from Southwest Front Headquarters to Eighth Army Headquarters for discussions. Brusilov immediately arranged for Diterikhs to visit him. At the end of a meeting that he described as satisfying, he asked Diterikhs to tell Ivanov that he had chosen not to travel to Southwest Front Headquarters in Berdichev as he had not been ordered to do so by Ivanov, who remained – for the moment at least – his superior. The response was immediate. Ivanov telegraphed Brusilov berating him for delaying and summoned him to Berdichev immediately.[138]

Up to this point in the war, senior commanders had been appointed, sacked and often re-appointed in the Russian Army for a variety of reasons, ranging from incompetence to patronage and factional infighting. Throughout this, Brusilov – unusual for Russian senior commanders in not being a graduate of the staff academy – had remained with Eighth Army, leading it to a series of successes. The one episode where he had achieved little was the protracted bloodbath in the Carpathian Mountains in early 1915, which was largely due to Ivanov's insistence on trying to penetrate through the mountains into Hungary. It should be remembered though – as Knox noted in his memoirs – that unlike almost every other senior officer, he had fought only against Austro-Hungarian forces, rarely if ever encountering significant German units.[139] He came from a family with a great military pedigree; his grandfather had fought against Napoleon, and his father retired with the rank of lieutenant general. He fought with distinction in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78 before becoming a leading cavalry commander with a reputation for innovation. After the war with Turkey, he became a corps commander, and then deputy commander of the Warsaw District before he clashed with the governor-general, Georgi Skalon, resulting in his transfer to an infantry corps in the Kiev District. Throughout this period, he carefully avoided becoming embroiled in the Sukhomlinov faction or the grouping of its opponents, and this is largely why he was not caught up in the constant changes that gripped much of the Russian command structure in the first half of the war. Now, at the age of 62, he was belatedly recognised as the one senior commander in the tsar's army who appeared to have a good understanding of the complexities of the war, and received a promotion that in many respects was overdue.

One of his first tasks was to speak to Ivanov, whom he found living in a railway car in Berdichev:

> In the evening I visited Ivanov, whom I found in despair; he wept bitterly and said that he could not understand why he had been dismissed, and I also could not answer that question for him, because I knew absolutely nothing. We talked a little about the situation at the front and he told me that in his opinion, any offensive operations were impossible and that the only thing that we could do was protect Southwest Front from any further enemy penetrations. I disagreed fundamentally with that and told him so …
>
> We went to the dining car for dinner, and there was a gathering of Ivanov's staff who introduced themselves to me … dinner was very sad, everyone sitting very downcast and glancing at Ivanov, who could not hold back his tears. He asked me abruptly if he could stay a few days longer at front headquarters. I told him that it was up to him, but I had to commence my new duties.[140]

It was not the end of the road for Ivanov. Although he had not been appointed to a new post, he travelled to *Stavka* and conspicuously stayed in the area, often sitting in his car outside the building where a meeting was being held. Eventually, the tsar took pity on him and invited him to attend meetings of *Stavka* in an advisory role.[141]

Brusilov had been anxious about taking up his new post as soon as possible, so that he could prepare for the meeting in Kamanets-Podolsk with the tsar and Alexeyev. Ivanov – or his supporters – had already spoken to the tsar, who questioned Brusilov about the various messages that he had received about the change of command of Southwest Front. Having dealt with this, Brusilov went on to tell Nicholas that contrary to Ivanov's reports to *Stavka*, the armies of Southwest Front were perfectly capable of further offensive operations after a brief period of rest and recuperation. The tsar then inspected an infantry division; Brusilov recorded that the visit did not fill the troops with confidence – Nicholas did his best, but he was not an inspiring or charismatic figure, and lacked the personal touch that would have made such a difference on these occasions.[142]

On 14 April, there was a full meeting of all front commanders at *Stavka* in Mogilev. Despite the failures of the winter battles and the assaults at Lake Naroch and on the Daugava, the commitments given at Chantilly required that Russia should organise its forces for a major assault in the summer in coordination with its Entente partners. In addition, Alexeyev suggested that if the French were able to hold off the German attacks on Verdun, it was inevitable that the Germans would resume attacks on the Eastern Front, and it was therefore important to strike while German attention was in the west.[143] The huge human resources of Russia continued to produce soldiers in large numbers, with the result that by the time the current annual intake was incorporated into the ranks, the tsar's armies could face the Central Powers with an estimated 750,000 more troops north of the Pripet Marshes than the Germans could deploy, and a more modest 130,000 more in the south than the combined German and Austro-Hungarian forces.[144] With such a preponderance in the north, Alexeyev concluded that it was only here that a successful attack could be launched, and he proposed essentially a replay of the March fighting; Second and Tenth Armies would attack once more near Lake Naroch, while the northern armies attempted to drive southwest over the Daugava. Additional reserves would be allocated to these sectors to help them. In particular, the forces of West Front would be increased to 480,000 compared to an estimated 82,000 Germans. In such circumstances, it should be possible to thrust towards Vilna.[145] However, despite this superiority, Alexeyev was doubtful that a major breakthrough and advance in depth could be achieved. Given the depth of the German defences, he concluded that the best that could be expected was to inflict major casualties on the German Army.[146]

Kuropatkin was next to speak, reporting that there was little prospect of the forces of Northern Front penetrating the strong defences of the Germans, and any attack would merely result in heavy losses. Alexeyev disagreed, though he accepted that there was a shortage of heavy artillery, both in terms of guns and ammunition. Evert then spoke in support of Kuropatkin and suggested that it might be better to hold a defensive posture until such time as more heavy artillery was available. The data from the British and particularly the French suggested that stockpiles of shells on a scale that had never been achieved in Russia had still failed to achieve a breakthrough; although everyone had attempted to reproduce Mackensen's successes of 1915, the formula had eluded them all, and the only solution that they could suggest was even more heavy artillery, with even more ammunition.

This concentration on artillery missed the real lessons of 1915. Whilst Mackensen had used his heavy artillery with great skill, his successes had owed much to other factors, hints to some of which can be seen in this fanciful description by a Russian officer:

> Creeping like some huge beast, the German Army would move its advanced units close to the Russian trenches, just near enough to hold the attention of its enemy

> and to be ready to occupy the trenches immediately after their evacuation. Next the gigantic beast would draw its tail, the heavy artillery, toward the trenches. That heavy artillery would take up positions which were almost or entirely beyond the range of the Russian field artillery, and the heavy guns would start to shower their shells on the Russian trenches, doing it methodically, as was characteristic of the Germans. That hammering would go on until nothing of the trenches remained, and their defenders would be destroyed. Then the beast would cautiously stretch out its paws, the infantry units, which would seize the demolished trenches.[147]

Mackensen's initial attacks had fallen on Russian forces that had been badly degraded by the fighting in the Carpathians earlier in the year, and there was insufficient defensive preparation in depth. Thereafter, his forces had always paused to bring up their guns, much as described above; the objectives of each stage of the offensive were deliberately modest. It should also be noted that Mackensen's greatest successes were in the early stages of his offensive; after that, the haul of prisoners and captured guns dropped significantly, after discounting the windfalls when the fortresses of Congress Poland fell to the advancing Germans. Against formations at full strength, with properly constructed field positions and adequate reserves and artillery available, it is likely that Mackensen's heavy artillery would have been just as ineffective as had been the case elsewhere. However, in the spring of 1916, Russia's generals chose to use their demands for utterly unrealistic amounts of artillery and ammunition as an excuse for inaction. Their personal reputations seem to have been more important than their duty to Russia – rather than risk a defeat and disgrace, they preferred to adopt a defensive stance.

Brusilov had already been told that in the coming summer offensives, his front would not be expected to attack, and would only advance when its northern neighbours made progress, but the new commander of Southwest Front rejected the cautious posture of his colleagues. Whilst accepting the problems caused by the shortage of heavy artillery, he insisted that his forces were capable of an attack. The thousands of replacements that had been sent to the front during the tenure of Polivanov as war minister had received training that had turned them into usable soldiers, and equipment levels were far higher than had ever been the case. Before the war, Russia's war industries had produced fewer than 1,300 artillery pieces per year; by early 1916, this had risen to over 5,000. Shell fuse production had risen from 1.5 million to 18 million, machine-gun production from 1,100 to 11,000, and shell production from 80,000 to over 20 million.[148] He suggested that previous attacks had failed largely because they been limited to narrow fronts, allowing the Central Powers to move troops to threatened sectors from quiet parts of the front. Even if his front was not going to make the main effort for the summer campaign, he felt that it should attack, if only to tie down enemy forces and prevent their redeployment against attacks launched by Evert and Kuropatkin.

Like all those present, Alexeyev was a little startled by Brusilov's readiness to attack. He replied that he had no objection in principle to an attack by Southwest Front, but reminded him that there would be little scope for sending him reinforcements or additional artillery ammunition above his existing allocation. Brusilov accepted this, maintaining that it was still perfectly possible for his forces to attack. Given that their fronts had been promised additional resources, this left Evert and Kuropatkin in an impossible situation – if Southwest Front was confident that it could attack despite receiving no reinforcements, they could not justify a failure to attack with their reinforced formations. Evert reluctantly agreed to plan an assault on a narrow front of about 12 miles (20km) with all of his heavy artillery concentrated in support – a plan not dissimilar to the one that ended in disaster in March.

At the end of the conference, the generals assembled for dinner, as Brusilov recalled:

> When we went to dinner, I was approached by one of the senior generals [according to other sources, it was Kuropatkin] who sat next to me and expressed his surprise that I sought permission to attack, and – amongst other things – said: 'You have just been appointed commander, and though you would be unhappy not to attack, don't risk your reputation, which is currently very high. Are you courting disaster, seeking dismissal and the loss of your military status that you have earned to date? In your place, I would be distancing myself from any offensive operations, as given the current state of affairs you will just do yourself harm.'[149]

After Brusilov respectfully rejected this advice, Kuropatkin merely looked at him and shrugged silently, with pity.

When he returned to Berdichev, Brusilov summoned his army commanders; Lechitsky was unable to attend due to illness, but the others learned that they would be expected to attack in late May. Shcherbachev expressed considerable doubts, but Brusilov informed them all that the decision was not open to discussion: the front would attack in accordance with his plans. Alexei Kaledin, who had replaced Brusilov as commander of Eighth Army, was dismayed to learn that his army would lead Southwest Front's general assault; Brusilov replied that as the former commander of Eighth Army, he knew the terrain over which it would be attacking, and he regarded the prospects as good. However, if Kaledin believed that he would be unable to succeed, Brusilov continued, the point of effort would be moved further south. Embarrassed, Kaledin acquiesced to Brusilov's plans.

The meeting then discussed in detail how to proceed. The starting point was to examine what had – and, equally important, what had not – succeeded so far. Once the initial phase of the war was over, it had proved almost impossible to manoeuvre around the flanks of enemy forces, and the only formula that had worked was what the Russians described as the 'German phalanx' – a concentration of troops and artillery on a modest front with the intention of levering the opposing forces back a limited distance, followed by a pause for ammunition, guns and other *matériel* to be brought forward. Mackensen had put this plan to very successful use throughout 1915, but it was not possible for Brusilov to emulate it, as he did not have access to sufficient heavy artillery. He would have to devise a different means of penetrating the enemy front. The French had developed the concept of an intense heavy bombardment of the German front line before an attack, but again, Brusilov simply didn't have the weight of guns to achieve this. His artillery would have to be used with far greater precision than ever before if it was to have sufficient impact.

Another issue that attracted the attention of Brusilov and his staff was the difficulty in keeping preparations secret from the enemy. Both sides were now familiar with the preparations that gave advance warning of an attack – for up to two months, it was possible to observe the assembly of troops, guns and supplies, and the movement of reserves into the front line alerted a watchful enemy to the fact that the assault was imminent. At the Mogilev conference in April, Evert had proposed building large shelters to protect assault troops and the reinforcements who would follow them from German artillery, and Brusilov planned to take this a step further: such shelters would be constructed along the entire breadth of his front. Whilst the German and Austro-Hungarian forces would be aware of them, they would not find it easy to determine whether they were occupied, and such widespread construction would also prevent any defecting soldiers from being able to pinpoint one location as more likely to be the site of a future attack than any other location. The large quantities of earth that were excavated would be used to create large banks beyond which the enemy could not observe preparations. Faced with such construction along the entire frontage of Southwest Front, it would not be possible for the enemy to determine precisely where an assault was likely to fall.

Brusilov was already aware of many of the shortcomings of the Russian Army and the operations that had been attempted, and led by Vladislav Klembovsky, his chief of staff, the officers of Southwest Front began a more detailed analysis with a view to finding solutions – it seems that Brusilov had already come up with many such solutions, and he now had an opportunity to start implementing them. In doing so, he had to make a virtue out of necessity: given that he was not going to receive lavish reinforcements, he had to use his existing resources far more effectively than had previously been the case.

With regard to the assault, Brusilov wished to avoid the terrible casualties that had been suffered in the winter battles when infantry was forced to advance across a large stretch of broken ground, usually made worse by the preliminary bombardment. Knowing that an attack was coming, defending artillery was able to subject this area to a lethal bombardment, tearing huge holes in the attackers' ranks. Instead, Brusilov intended to extend trenches forward from his front line as far as possible, exposing the assaulting infantry to the absolute minimum time in the open. In addition, both sides had grown accustomed to watching for the other side removing its own barbed wire and other obstacles, a sure sign of an imminent attack. Instead, Brusilov ordered his men to dig tunnels under the Russian barbed wire entanglements in order to avoid any possibility of alerting the enemy. Nor would there be the massed formations of previous assaults. Each of his armies was to select a sector for its attack of about 9 miles' (15km) width, and then advance with two reinforced infantry corps, a total of about five infantry divisions. The troops were to be deployed in distinct waves. The first wave, lavishly equipped with hand grenades, was to capture the enemy's foremost line of trenches and attempt to destroy strongpoints from where flanking fire might be brought to bear, as had been the case in the winter battles. The second wave, following close behind, would move on to the second line of defensive trenches. The third wave would bring forward machine-guns to help beat off any counterattack, and in conjunction with the fourth wave, would attempt to widen the penetration as much as possible. Finally, cavalry would be waiting to exploit any breakthrough.

Short of guns and ammunition, he was unable to plan for a massive, prolonged bombardment – in any case, there was little objective evidence that such bombardment achieved very much. Even the great German advance of 1915, in which heavy artillery played such an important role, had been marked by repeated occasions when attacking German troops found that the preliminary bombardment had not destroyed the Russian defences, and had had to call on the gunners to carry out further shelling. Every gun battery was given specific 'fire missions', with light guns deployed right in the front line subordinated to the local infantry; these guns would be used to create holes in the enemy barbed wire, and could also be used in conjunction with the first wave of troops to deal with enemy strongpoints. The heavy guns would strike at communications trenches to prevent the free movement of enemy reserves, and would switch their fire to deeper targets in order to suppress defensive artillery fire as the infantry advanced. In an attempt to prevent delays while guns were brought forward, Brusilov ordered that all heavy batteries were to deploy within 2 miles (3km) of the front line.[150] Every heavy battery was to construct multiple positions, and would only move its guns to their firing points on the night before the assault.

Alexander Nikolayevich Winogradsky was an artillery officer who had served with the Russian Guards' horse artillery, and was transferred to command an artillery brigade in Eighth Army in early 1916, when Brusilov was still the army commander. The two men had served together when Brusilov commanded a cavalry division of the Guards, and Winogradsky swiftly embraced the principles that Brusilov wished his army – and later his front – to follow:

> After my arrival at 14th [Artillery] Brigade I busied myself with resolving all issues [of training] and getting the greatest efficiency from the artillery. Communications were strengthened and camouflage improved. Owing to the limitations of our aviation, I was not able to familiarise the batteries with firing regulated by aerial observers, or of getting photographs of our positions, which might have indicated to me any defects in our camouflage.
>
> This work bore little resemblance to what had happened at the beginning of the war, particularly in the horse artillery, but I soon grew accustomed to it with the aid of the excellent instructions of the high command, which I regret were sometimes not adequately followed by the troops.
>
> … My second concern was to establish close liaison between my batteries and the infantry formations, and not just superficially for the sake of appearances. This was the hardest to achieve, as I encountered obstacles created by a lack of knowledge of the abilities of artillery amongst the infantry. Whilst the former still had some of its original cadre who had not just served in their specialty but during the war had also acquired a strong general experience of the art of war, the majority of infantry officers brought forward to replace losses, recently promoted and inexperienced, were inclined to make demands of the artillery that it could not satisfy; however, I always did what I could to take account of the grim life of soldiers in the trenches. Regular support of the infantry by the artillery, without any friction, is one of the most important factors in establishing the strong bond that is necessary between the two arms …

> I required my subordinates to visit the infantry trenches regularly and to establish rapport with their comrades; conversely, I asked the latter to take every opportunity to visit the artillery observers. Together, they studied the terrain, debated objectives and the degree of artillery support required – in each particular case – and rapidly and easily reached a degree of understanding.[151]

The defensive lines in front of Brusilov's armies were formidable, though varied. There were two – in places up to four – lines of defence, separated from each other by about 3 miles (5km). Each defensive line consisted of two sets of trenches with extensive concrete bunkers for machine-guns and light artillery, positioned to allow them to bring any attack under flanking fire. The first line of trenches was generally very deep with some overhead protection and a firestep with loopholes for infantry to observe and fire on attackers. Bunkers for infantry had been prepared immediately behind the first line of trenches after the experiences of the winter fighting, and it was expected that troops would shelter here during the anticipated heavy Russian bombardment before manning the parapet to repulse massed infantry attacks; in order to improve protection, many of the roofs of these bunkers were reinforced with concrete. Communication trenches linked each pair of lines of trenches, and after the experiences of the winter, the defenders expected to be able to beat off any Russian attack with ease.[152]

The description of the Austro-Hungarian defences in front of the Russian Eighth Army's IV Cavalry Corps in a report sent to Southwest Front shows the obstacles that Brusilov's attack would have to overcome:

> The Austrians have sought to make full use of terrain that was favourable for defence, creating a fortified zone of three lines of trenches, with three barbed wire zones (each with four rows of staked wire) that are enhanced by land mines. There are several concrete emplacements near Manevichi and Chartoriysk for field guns and machine-guns.[153]

The bunkers or shelters in which Austro-Hungarian infantry would sit out any preliminary bombardment were as robust as any on the Western Front, as Brusilov described:

> The shelters were very widespread, dug deep and protected their occupants from heavy artillery shells. Their roofs consisted of two rows of logs, covered by a layer of soil at least 2m thick, in some cases reinforced with concrete, and many had been designed for comfort: the walls and ceilings were covered with boards or

> planks, and the floors were either planked or earthen … and where possible, glazed window frames had been fitted. Some had portable iron stoves and there were bunks and shelves. Officers had 'suites' of three or four rooms with a kitchen, painted floors, and papered walls.[154]

The field positions were better than those that were used to such good effect in January, and when he visited the trenches of Austro-Hungarian units subordinated to his command, the dour German commander of *Heeresgruppe Linsingen* was remarkably effusive about the quality of the defences.[155] This was particularly noteworthy given the poor relationship between Alexander von Linsingen and his Austro-Hungarian counterparts. Originally, the East Prussian general had commanded the German South Army, where the Austro-Hungarian officers of the neighbouring Seventh Army found it almost impossible to establish a good working relationship with him and his chief of staff. When the German Army of the Bug was created, he was assigned its commander, to the relief of the Austro-Hungarian officers in the southern part of the front, where the German South Army now came under the command of the more congenial Bavarian Felix von Bothmer. When Conrad's armies ran into trouble in the autumn of 1915, Linsingen took command of a large portion of the front line to the south of the Pripet Marshes, placing him in control of several Austro-Hungarian formations. Almost immediately, he clashed with Archduke Joseph Ferdinand, commander of the Austro-Hungarian Fourth Army. The latter had very little military credibility; Conrad had actually wished to dismiss him in the wake of the Black-Yellow Offensive, but the fact that Joseph Ferdinand was a godson of Emperor Franz Joseph and had previously been praised for showing great military skill in the opening months of the war made this impossible. The reality was that Joseph Ferdinand had performed no more than adequately in the opening battles in Galicia, but given the scale of the debacle that overtook the *k.u.k.* Army, there was a desperate need for heroes, and his achievements were greatly inflated in official announcements. As the Eastern Front grew quiet in early 1916, Joseph Ferdinand showed little enthusiasm for maintaining the preparedness of his men, surrounding himself with favourites. He clearly resented being placed under the authority of the German Linsingen, and perhaps as a result of this he was promoted to Colonel-General in February, technically outranking Linsingen. Falkenhayn had appointed Linsingen to command this sector when he had baled out the increasingly perilous situation in the autumn of 1915, and had no intention of allowing Linsingen's – and therefore Germany's – overall control to slip. Linsingen was immediately promoted to colonel-general, backdated to ensure that he remained senior to Joseph Ferdinand. The Austro-Hungarian archduke was, predictably, deeply irritated by this development, and cooperation deteriorated even further; communication between his headquarters and that of Linsingen thereafter was in written form only. Given these developments, the front line Austro-Hungarian trenches that Linsingen praised so enthusiastically in a visit shortly before Brusilov's offensive must have been impressive to be acclaimed in such a manner.

Every respect of the preparation for the coming attack was meticulous and precise to an unprecedented degree. Intelligence about enemy defences was obtained by every source available – aerial reconnaissance, the interception of signals and interrogation of prisoners and deserters. Using this, each army commander determined the best area for attacking, and after Brusilov had personally approved the choices, replicas of the Austro-Hungarian and German positions were constructed in the rear of the Russian line, as Winogradsky described:

> The infantry practised and adapted methods of attacking fortified positions specifically prepared for this purpose. We too had the opportunity to study the most effective means of providing support in the realities of time and terrain, instead of having to rely on probabilities. At the beginning of May, we commenced detailed artillery planning using the results of these reconnaissances. This mode of work, where nothing was left to chance or to improvisation at the last moment before action but instead in which all of the important details had been considered and reviewed in advance was something new for us.[156]

Meanwhile, aware that the German and Austro-Hungarian armies had profited in the past by monitoring Russian signals traffic, Brusilov sent false orders by radio and even by messengers who might be captured. Wherever possible, the real orders were passed on in face-to-face meetings.

It would have been impossible in any event to hide signs of preparation for the coming offensive, and both the German and Austro-Hungarian troops reported the new developments, but Brusilov's preparations at so many different points helped dilute the importance of reports from any front line observers to higher commands. Repeated reports of Russian trenches being sapped forwards were often ignored, and although in some areas local commanders attempted to disrupt Russian digging with artillery fire, this was rarely heavy or prolonged enough to achieve more than temporary delays. To some extent, this was due to contradictory orders regarding the use of artillery ammunition; on the one hand, senior commanders recognised the importance of such harassing fire, but on the other hand, the priority of supply for the *k.u.k.* Army was now the Italian front and the divisions on the Eastern Front were ordered to conserve ammunition to deal with a proper Russian attack.[157] Attempts were also made to disrupt sapping operations by mounting aggressive patrols into no-man's land; the first such raids began at the end of March in the sector held by the Austro-Hungarian 2nd Infantry Division, and then spread to other areas. These raids were not without risk, as the troops of the Austro-Hungarian 7th Infantry Division discovered in late April. A night raid overran the new Russian trenches and yielded nearly 200 prisoners, but the Austro-Hungarian troops failed to withdraw sufficiently swiftly and were caught in a Russian counterattack that cost them several hundred casualties. Another raid the following night also resulted in losses, and attempts were abandoned.[158] However, the casualties suffered were modest on the scale of the war – one estimate is that fewer than 1,000 men were lost.[159] The unwillingness to pursue the disruptive raids is curious, and was perhaps motivated by several different factors, including a desire to avoid local actions from escalating into heavier fighting; after the appalling hardships of previous campaigns, soldiers and officers alike appear to have been reluctant to disturb the relative calm that had descended on the front line.

There were two main factors that prevented the German and Austro-Hungarian higher commands from reacting more forcefully to Russian preparations. The first was based upon a sense of complete superiority. The Russian attacks in the winter and in March had been crushed with almost contemptuous ease, requiring only modest redeployment of reserves. In May, Conrad authorised a document entitled *Erfahrungen aus der russisch Märzoffensive 1916 gegen die deutsche 10. Armee* ('Experiences from the Russian March 1916 offensive against the German Tenth Army') that was sent to all front line units. It stressed the preparations that had been observed in the past – deployment of reserves, stockpiling of ammunition, dismantling of Russian barbed wire, etc – and concluded that it would therefore be possible to anticipate when and where an attack was coming. The offensive capability of the Russian Army was regarded as poor, with low-quality troops commanded by officers who were more concerned with preventing their men from fleeing than with leading them in attacks.[160] It was inevitable that such confidence rapidly crossed the line into complacency. Oberst Rudolf Kundmann, one of Conrad's adjutants, recorded in his diary in early May that there was little sign of any impending Russian attack, largely because Brusilov's men were not behaving in accordance with the preparations described in Conrad's report. Just a few days later, he accepted that an attack seemed likely, but he regarded the threat as insignificant – Russian troops were too poorly trained to carry out anything other than mass attacks, which could easily be crushed.[161]

Despite clear evidence of Russian preparations, Seventh Army Headquarters repeatedly insisted throughout April that an enemy offensive was 'unlikely'. By contrast, diplomatic sources – particularly in Bucharest – alerted Vienna that Romania expected a major Russian attack in the southern part of the Eastern Front. By the middle of May, even Pflanzer-Baltin had to admit that an attack could not be ruled out. The staff of Fourth Army had plentiful reports from prisoner interrogations about Russian intentions, including the planned use of gas. However, the attention of *AOK* was now elsewhere.[162]

The second reason why German and Austro-Hungarian officers ignored Russian preparations was distraction. Whilst they might not have had plans for any offensive in the east, the Central Powers intended to attack elsewhere, and their failure to coordinate contributed greatly to the problems that they faced as the year wore on. The assault on Verdun was grinding on, and although Falkenhayn remained certain that it was going well, German losses were climbing steadily. Meanwhile, Conrad continued to develop his plans for a war-winning strike against Italy. At the end of 1915, he had asked Falkenhayn to assign more German troops to the Eastern Front, which would have allowed him to withdraw Austro-Hungarian divisions for use in the Alps, but Falkenhayn had refused. In late January, with the rift between the two headquarters having moved on from complete non-communication to terse exchanges, Conrad travelled to *OHL* to meet Falkenhayn, and outlined once more the opportunities that beckoned in Italy. The front line in northeast Italy had a large south-facing bulge around the Trentino region, and Conrad intended to attack from this bulge towards the south and southeast. If his troops could break through the Italian lines and reach the Adriatic – a distance of less than 60 miles (100km) – they would isolate three Italian armies around Venice. Destruction of these would deal a major blow to Italy, perhaps forcing the nation that Conrad and others in Vienna repeatedly accused of treachery into suing for peace. Falkenhayn remained unimpressed, refusing to tone down his opposition to Conrad's plans.

Cramon, the German liaison officer in *AOK*, noted that Conrad did not seem particularly angry at Falkenhayn's rejection of his plans. He concluded that the Austro-Hungarian chief of staff probably felt that he was now able to proceed without interference by Falkenhayn. Cramon's position was not helped by Falkenhayn's characteristic reluctance to take others into his confidence about his future plans; without knowing precisely what Falkenhayn was planning on the Western Front, Cramon was in no position to mount a robust defence of the

German position. It was only on 8 February that *AOK* had clear confirmation of an attack in the west and its precise location at Verdun.[163] Inevitably, Falkenhayn's reluctance to confide in Conrad was reciprocated, and Conrad made no attempt to make Falkenhayn aware of the scale of his preparations for an offensive in Italy. Cramon tried repeatedly and in vain to obtain details of the planned attack, and only succeeded in April, the same month that French and Italian newspapers published relatively accurate figures about the Austro-Hungarian build-up. Some within the *k.u.k.* Army blamed this on deserters, but the reality was that it was almost impossible to concentrate troops without the other side noticing.[164]

Predictably, Falkenhayn's opponents in *Ober Ost* had a different view of Conrad. Hoffmann later wrote:

> The ideas of the Chief of the Austrian General Staff were good – at least as far as they became known to me – they were all good, and this cannot always be said of the ideas of our own Commander-in-Chief. The misfortune of that man of genius was that he had not the proper instrument by which he could transform his ideas into facts.[165]

This ignores a fundamental truth: the instrument that failed Conrad – the *k.u.k.* Army – was, in terms of its training and doctrine, very much the creation of Conrad himself. He had dominated almost every aspect of military training in the decade before the war. Infantry training and doctrine, command and control, the use of artillery – all of these were laid down by Conrad in his voluminous training manuals. The officer corps of the army was dominated by men he had personally trained, and if the 'instrument' was not able to deliver his objectives, the responsibility lay almost entirely with him. It is more likely that Hoffmann's description of Conrad as a 'man of genius' reflects their shared antipathy of Falkenhayn rather than any real recognition of Conrad's military skills; after all, the Austro-Hungarian chief of staff had achieved almost no successes in the entire war.

Conrad now began the transfer of Kövesz's troops from the Balkans and four divisions from the Eastern Front to the intended battlefields of the Alps – after all, the Russian assaults at Czernowitz, the Strypa valley, Lake Naroch and on the Daugava had all been repulsed with ease. Future attacks would also be defeated in a similar manner, and it was no longer necessary to leave such large forces facing a cowed Russia. To make matters worse, many of the experienced divisions on the Eastern Front were withdrawn and sent to the Alps, and replaced by formations largely composed of new inexperienced recruits. Training was limited to digging further fortifications, drill and parades, and only a limited amount of target practice – in short, nothing that really prepared the men for combat.[166]

In a defensive battle, this might have been less important if those recruits had been led by officers of sufficient calibre, but the casualties in the officer corps – as was the case for every army in the war – were even higher than those for lower ranks. Most of the experienced officers were transferred to the Italian front in preparation for Conrad's offensive; the divisions left on the Eastern Front had very few 'career' officers in their battalions and companies.

The original start date for the *Strafexpedition* ('Punishment Expedition') against Italy was delayed due to difficulties with the weather, as Cramon recalled:

> Initially, the beginning of the attack was set for 10 April. But heavy snow made it impossible to stick to this timetable. On 20 April and 1 May too there were further postponements for the same reason. Conrad raged that snow had never lain so long in the high South Tyrol plateau in the same quantities as at the beginning of the year. But others who knew the land stated that the start date was too early even for normal weather.[167]

It was entirely characteristic that neither Conrad nor any of his senior staff had actually visited the front line to survey the planned battlefield. The entire operation was planned on maps without any regard to the realities on the ground, much as other ill-fated Austro-Hungarian offensives – Potiorek's disastrous invasions of Serbia, the attempts to force the line of the Carpathians in early 1915, and the autumn fighting later the same year in Volhynia – had been organised without any regard for terrain, weather, or the realities of moving supplies and men over difficult ground. In addition, there were difficulties with the chain of command that almost guaranteed complications at the very least. The commander of the Italian front was Archduke Eugen, with General Alfred Krauss as his chief of staff. The forces under Eugen's command consisted of Generaloberst Viktor Dankl's Eleventh Army and General Hermann Kövesz's Third Army. Both army commanders were close adherents of Conrad, but neither Eugen nor Krauss were of the same inclination; whenever Dankl and Kövesz had disagreements with Eugen, they simply protested directly to Conrad, particularly in the case of Dankl. Inevitably, this created considerable ill feeling at Eugen's headquarters in Marburg. In addition, XX Corps, part of Dankl's army, was commanded by Archduke Karl, the heir to the throne, and Krauss tried to organise matters so that this corps was guaranteed success in the coming battle by allocating it a disproportionate amount of the available artillery.

The front line commanders grew increasingly concerned that their preparations were now clearly visible to the Italians, and in early May Falkenhayn asked

Cramon to suggest to Conrad that as it was no longer possible to surprise the Italians, it might be better to abandon the planned attack and instead send some of the Austro-Hungarian troops that had been assembled to the Western Front. Nobody can have been particularly surprised when Conrad rejected the suggestion. There was further acrimony when Conrad became aware that Krauss had issued orders that were completely at odds with the doctrine that the chief of the general staff had laid down before the war: Krauss wanted his army commanders to avoid the heavy (and in his opinion pointless) casualties that had been suffered in attacks to date. Instead, they were to seek out weak points and concentrate on those. Conrad might remain in post, but his teaching that it was important to seek out the enemy's strength and to break it, regardless of casualties, was increasingly being questioned in an army that had lost over 3 million men since the beginning of the war.[168]

The attack finally began on 15 May. The details of the campaign are beyond the scope of this work; briefly, the campaign started well for Conrad with early successes, and even Falkenhayn sent him hearty congratulations, but although the centre of the Austro-Hungarian line made steady progress and advanced perhaps 15 miles (24km) – about a quarter of the distance to the Adriatic coast south of Venice – its flanks were held up. As was repeatedly the case in the First World War, reserves that had been intended to exploit any initial success were too slow in coming forward, and valuable momentum was lost. At *AOK*, Cramon doubted that it would be possible to continue the assault in Italy without substantial additional troops as reinforcements, but this was a minority point of view, both within Austria-Hungary and the Entente. It seemed to many that Conrad's forces would fight their way free of the mountains onto the North Italian plain, and Italy invoked the agreement that had been made in Chantilly, that if any Entente power were attacked by the Central Powers, the other members of the Entente would launch attacks of their own. Marshall Luigi Cadorna, chief of staff of the Italian Army, abandoned plans for yet another assault on the blood-soaked Isonzo sector and diverted large numbers of troops to block the Austro-Hungarian advance, exhorting his men to fight on and halt the enemy before he broke out of the mountainous terrain.

Three days before Conrad's Italian offensive opened, the Italians expressed concerns to their allies about the Austro-Hungarian preparations, and on the eve of the attack the Italian ambassador in Petrograd, Marchese Andrea Carlotti, met the tsar for discussions. He was dismayed to learn that the Russians intended to attack no sooner than the second half of June, and a sustained diplomatic effort began to accelerate Russian plans. On 19 May, the Italian plenipotentiary at *Stavka*, Major

General Ruggeri, made a formal request to Alexeyev to bring forward the start date for the Russian summer offensive. This was reinforced by reports from Colonel Enkel, the Russian military attaché in Rome, that made clear the danger to the Italian Army, and Alexeyev contacted the front commanders to ask them when they might be in a position to begin the offensive. Brusilov replied that he could commence operations on 1 June; the other two front commanders were less optimistic, suggesting that it would be impossible to begin until the middle of the month. Alexeyev decided that Brusilov should attack on 4 June, followed ten days later by the rest of the Russian Army. The tsar formalised this in a written order on 26 May.[169] Detailed orders for all fronts followed five days later. It is noteworthy that at this stage, Brusilov's attack was expected to be an auxiliary operation, with the main effort still being made by West Front. By starting on 10 or 11 June, West Front could expect to attack a front line that had been weakened by the diversion of troops to the south to deal with Brusilov's Southwest Front, while the role of Northern Front had been reduced compared to that of Evert's armies, and would serve in much the same manner as Brusilov's forces – it would tie down German troops to prevent them being sent to oppose West Front.

Brusilov was not entirely happy about the interval between his attack and that of Evert's front; in particular, he was concerned that should the start date for West Front slip any further, there was the very real possibility of the Central Powers concentrating their resources against his armies and then having time to turn north to defeat Evert. Alexeyev assured him that there would be no slippage, and West Front would attack as planned. He had repeatedly expressed doubts about Brusilov's plans, urging him to concentrate his efforts at fewer points in accordance with more orthodox Russian doctrine, and made the same suggestion during a telephone conversation on the eve of Brusilov's attack, apparently conveying the concerns of the tsar and proposing that by delaying his attack until Evert was ready, Brusilov would have sufficient time to regroup his troops. Brusilov flatly refused on the grounds that by the time such instructions could reach the front line, the artillery would be about to start its preparatory fire, and changes of orders at such a late stage were certain to have an adverse effect on troop morale. If Alexeyev and the tsar were insistent on a change, he continued, he would have to resign from his post. Alexeyev replied that the tsar had retired to bed, and Brusilov should think hard on the matter; the response was uncompromising. Unless Alexeyev was prepared to overrule Brusilov immediately, the attacks would go ahead as planned. Faced by this, Alexeyev – perhaps characteristically, for Russian senior officers – acquiesced, ending the conversation with the words:

> Well, God bless you, do what you know best. I will report this conversation to the tsar tomorrow.[170]

In other words: Alexeyev was distancing himself from Brusilov's decision. If things went badly wrong, Brusilov alone would carry the blame. Fundamentally, the disagreement was brought about by different strategic aims. In common with most commanders of the day, Alexeyev was still thinking in terms of attacks designed to secure key objectives, such as important cities or rail junctions. Brusilov had a very different vision: his intention was to destroy the enemy forces facing him. Once sufficient casualties had been inflicted upon them, the achievement of geographic objectives would be far simpler.

Alexeyev wasn't alone in doubting the wisdom of Brusilov's plans. Southwest Front's army commanders repeatedly expressed their concerns, and Kaledin in particular, entrusted with Brusilov's old command of Eighth Army, required repeated visits from Brusilov, in which the latter employed a judicious mix of encouragement, reassurance, and threats of dismissal to motivate Kaledin. Lechitsky remained unwell, with General Alexander Krimov, who had achieved some success commanding cavalry formations for Southwest Front, often attending meetings on his behalf, and both men questioned whether their Ninth Army would be able to prevail. Nevertheless, Brusilov was determined and persuasive enough to ensure that all was ready for the execution of his grand plan.

The stage was thus set. The officers and men of the Central Powers believed unquestioningly in their superiority over the Russians, and were confident that any cumbersome enemy assault would founder without making a significant dent in their formidable fortifications. Most Russian commanders believed that Brusilov was about to throw away a hard-won reputation for skilful command, and that the best that could be expected was that German and Austro-Hungarian troops might be detained in the south while the main effort was made by Evert's West Front. If Brusilov had any doubts, they are absent from his memoirs. His only regrets on the eve of the great offensive seem to have been that he had not been sufficiently forceful in ensuring that his former Eighth Army was commanded by a man of his choice.

CHAPTER 5

BRUSILOV'S OFFENSIVE BEGINS

Given that the mission assigned to Southwest Front in the initial planning of *Stavka* was to support the main effort, which would be made by West Front, Brusilov decided that Eighth Army – on the northern wing of Southwest Front and hence closest to Evert's troops – would make the main effort, with a thrust intended to capture Lutsk and Kovel after the enemy defences had been crushed. Kaledin would attack with XXXII Corps in the south, VIII and XL Corps in the centre, and XXXIX Corps in the north – a force of 148 infantry battalions, opposed by fifty-three enemy battalions. In addition, 4th Finnish Rifle Division and 12th Cavalry Division would be available as reserves to exploit the initial advances. The troops of Jakov Fedorovich Gillenschmidt's IV Cavalry Corps, supported by the newly created XLVI Corps, would operate on the northern flank of Eighth Army. Opposing them was Joseph Ferdinand's Fourth Army, which had belatedly recognised preparations for a Russian attack and had constructed further fortifications. In the south was *Gruppe Szurmay*, largely consisting of XXIV Corps; X Corps held the centre; and II Corps was on the northern flank. Although they had been in the same positions since the previous autumn, the men of General Hugo Martiny's X Corps knew that their positions were less than ideal. In places, Russian positions allowed for the defences to be brought under flanking fire, but on this quiet sector, there had not been sufficient resources to allow Martiny to put matters right; nor had there been any prospect of X Corps being allowed to pull back to a better line. In other parts of Fourth Army's sector, the combination of swampy areas, a shortage of timber, and few usable roads prevented defences from being constructed on the scale seen elsewhere. Nevertheless, the same mood of confidence that prevailed throughout the *k.u.k.* Army on the Eastern Front prevailed:

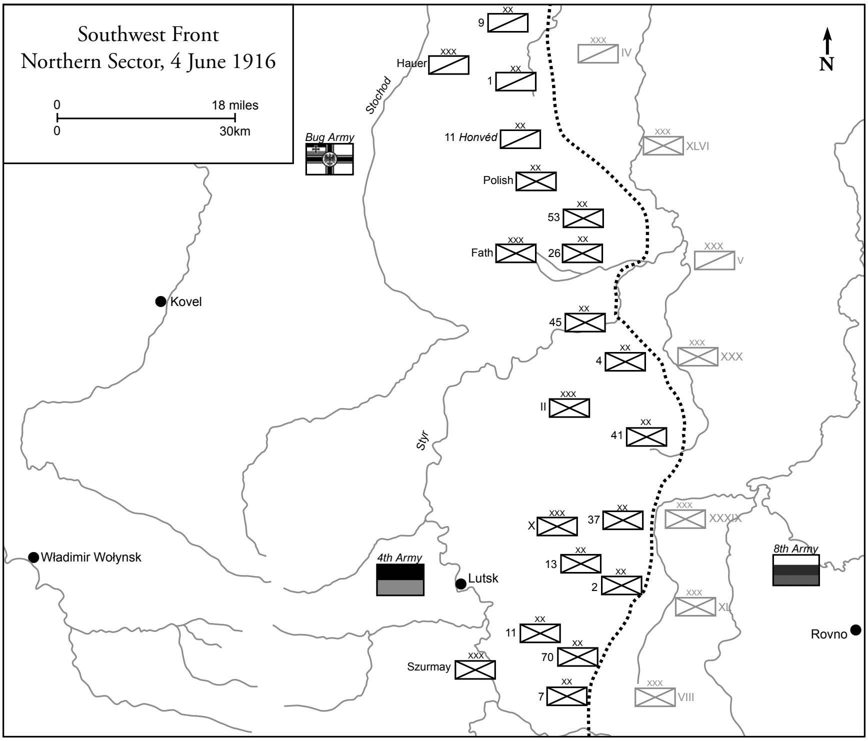
> It goes without saying that the corps chief of staff and all sections of staff, including medics, stayed in closest possible touch with the troops and were personally familiar with all their circumstances. But above all was the corps commander, who rarely missed the opportunity to visit a listening post amongst the barbed wire during darkness, at a point where the two lines lay close to each other.[171]

Additional troops were deployed in the rear of X Corps in the days immediately before Brusilov's attack, and extra supplies of ammunition arrived in the front line late on 3 June in anticipation of the coming battle. The Austro-Hungarian officers knew an attack was coming and had positioned experienced men with adequate supplies to receive it. It was now too late to consider whether they might have done more to disrupt Russian preparations.

The great assault launched by Southwest Front divides into distinct phases. The first covered the initial assault and its immediate success. This success – largely unexpected to everyone other than Brusilov – was followed by a period of frantic troop movements, as the Central Powers struggled to restore their lines and the Russians attempted to make maximum use of the breakthrough. The third phase in mid-June saw the Germans attempt to restore the situation by mounting a counteroffensive, and at the end of the month the Russians attempted to re-energise their own assault. Finally, the fifth phase saw the fighting continue into the autumn, as the Russians tried to seize Stanislau in the south and Kovel in the north. These phases will now be described in turn.

As with almost every battle of the First World War, the opening of what would become known as the Brusilov Offensive was marked by artillery fire. Brusilov described the role of his gunners:

> At dawn on 22 May [Russian calendar – 4 June in the western calendar] heavy artillery fire began in designated areas across Southwest Front. The main obstacle for the attacking infantry was rightly thought to be the rows of wire because of their strength and number, so light artillery was tasked to create numerous gaps in these rows. The big guns and howitzers were assigned the task of destroying the foremost trenches of the first fortified zone, and finally to suppress enemy artillery fire. When it achieved any given task, the artillery was to move its fire to other targets that were regarded as most urgent to help the infantry move forward in every possible way. In general, artillery is of great importance in the success of an attack, it commences the attack and with proper training, after making sufficient passes of the barbed wire and enemy fortifications, shelters and machine-gun positions, it must accompany the infantry attack and prevent the approach of


Southwest Front
Northern Sector, 4 June 1916
0
18 miles
0
30km
N
9
Hauer
1
Stochod
Bug Army
11 Honvéd
Polish
53
Fath
26
IV
XLVI
V
Kovel
45
4
XXX
II
41
Styr
X
37
XXXIX
Władimir Wołynsk
4th Army
Lutsk
13
2
XL
8th Army
Rovno
11
70
Szurmay
7
VIII

> enemy reserves. From this, it can be seen that the role of the commander of artillery is of great importance and he is like the conductor of the orchestra, and to control this fire he must have extremely well constructed telephone communications with his guns, which cannot be disrupted during the battle.[172]

As part of the Russian VIII Corps, Winogradsky's artillery brigade had planned in detail for the moment of truth:

> For their first mission, our 76mm guns were given the mission of making twenty -four breaches in the accessory defences at points indicated by the infantry commanders. They ensured that there were no misunderstandings; all the same, after working together, the gunners and infantry studied the lines and particulars of the Austrian lines in detail, the machine-gun nests, the flanking positions, etc … We feared hidden and mobile machine-guns which might remain intact despite the [artillery] preparation and supporting fire. The destruction of machine-gun nests, the firing points on the trench parapets, and communications

> trenches, and the creeping barrage in front of the assault infantry was of course tasked to the 76mm guns, while the 155mm howitzers and 120mm guns were required to destroy hard points in keeping with the local plan of action.[173]

The first reports of the bombardment reached X Corps Headquarters at 4 a.m. from the southern sector, held by 2nd Infantry Division. This was followed by further messages of Russian artillery fire across the entire front, and by 9 a.m. there were signs of Russian infantry gathering in their trenches. Shortly thereafter, the Russian artillery fire changed and concentrated on key fortifications and approach routes that might be used by reinforcements, and towards the middle of the day there were signs that Russian troops were dismantling their own barbed wire in places. Finally, in mid-afternoon, the Russian infantry advanced. In many locations, the Austro-Hungarian artillery opened fire as planned, bringing the attack to a standstill, and the confident mood continued at every level – the Russian attack was being held, much as expected, and casualties were reported to be modest, not least because of the improvements in shelters for the troops that had been built since the winter battles. Messages reached *AOK* in distant Teschen, where the staff were more interested in reports of panic in the Italian parliament than the news of Russian artillery fire, and were busy celebrating the birthday of Archduke Frederick, the nominal commander of the *k.u.k.* Army.

Winogradsky described the opening bombardment:

> The 76mm guns began to create breaches in the barbed wire with careful, observed shots to ensure satisfactory results. Soon, we could hear the deep sound of the howitzers and could see fountains of blackness rising into the sky above the enemy lines from the explosions of our powerful 155s. The cadenced, continuous fire of the artillery made a strong impression on our infantry who had never before had the chance to see and experience the effects of a prolonged, powerful preparation by friendly artillery. Under the thunderous spell of the cannonade, the infantry acquired a strong and enduring belief in the destructive power of their support, opening the road to victory.[174]

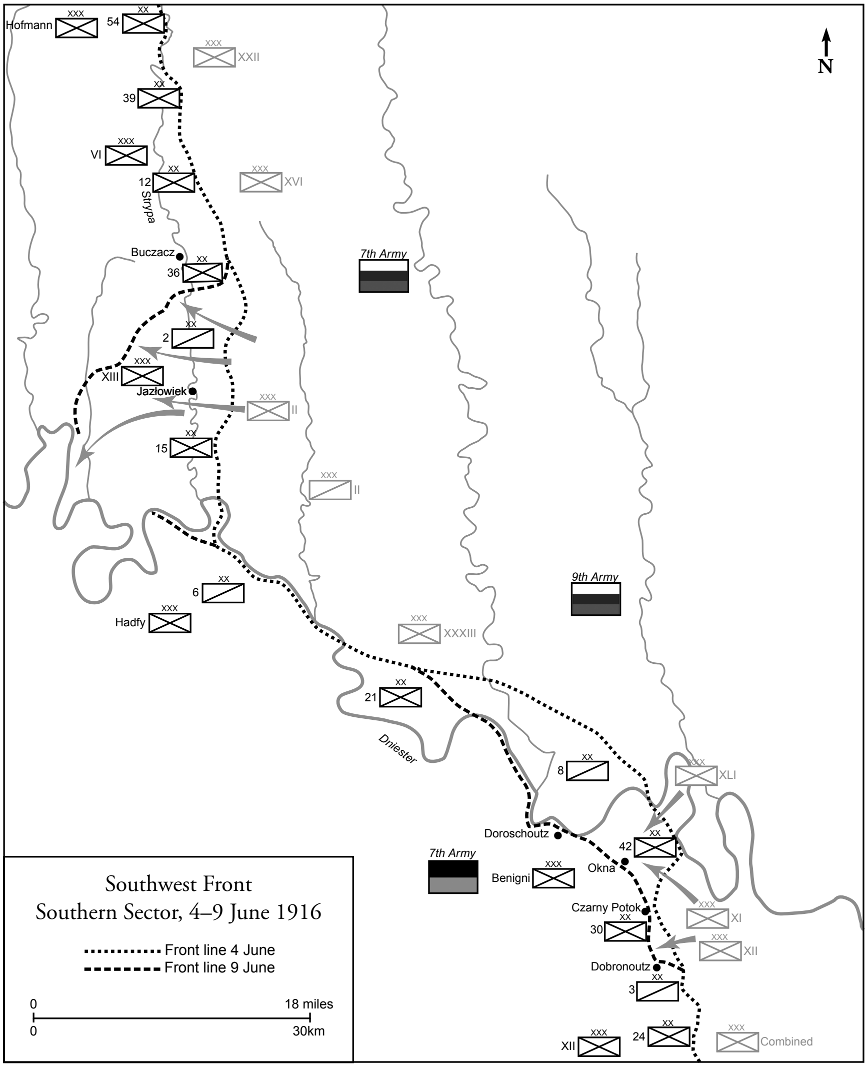
Whilst the Austro-Hungarian defences in Fourth Army's sector appeared to be relatively untroubled, there were problems elsewhere. Further south was Eduard von Böhm-Ermolli's Second Army, and the phased bombardment of its positions by the Russian Eleventh Army did considerable damage to the defences. There were repeated pauses in the Russian artillery fire, during which the artillery observers assessed the damage that had been inflicted and directed the gun batteries to target the positions that had survived – a huge change from the indiscriminate pounding that preceded the assaults at Lake Naroch earlier in the year. With each pause, the Austro-Hungarian defenders manned their parapets, only to be driven back into shelter when the firing resumed, and with each such cycle, fewer troops were prepared to venture out again. Finally, when the Russian infantry launched a major attack, too few Austro-Hungarian men managed to leave the shelter of their deep bunkers to fight them off, and a section of the northern flank of Second Army was overrun.

The attack was remarkable for the deployment of a new weapon. In August 1914, War Minister Sukhomlinov had tasked Colonel Dobrzansky with forming a unit that was equipped with armoured cars. The first company had apparently served with the Russian Second Army in Poland in October, but does not appear to have made any major impression, and further expansion of this new arm was hindered by the relatively primitive nature of Russian cars. By the end of 1914, vehicles built in Britain and France had begun to arrive, but many were regarded as having inadequate protection – British-built Austins had only 4mm of steel plating, and this was replaced with stronger (and heavier) 7mm plates. There were also concerns with their armament, and experiments were carried out with a variety of machine-guns and weapons of up to 37mm calibre; however, the reliability of the cars, particularly on the poor roads of eastern Europe, remained problematic, and there were suggestions that they should all be converted into railcars. A group of thirteen armoured vehicles assisted the Russian attack against Second Army's northern flank; the axis of advance was along a railway line, and at least one of the armoured cars used in the attack, bearing the name *Tsarevich* ('Crown Prince'), was railbound. It succeeded in penetrating to a position from where its machine-guns could fire into the flanks of the defenders' positions. The trenches were swiftly overrun, but *Tsarevich* did not enjoy further success, crashing off the rails into the Austro-Hungarian defences. During the evening, engineers recovered the armoured car and took it back for repairs.[175] Nevertheless, the Russian infantry that accompanied the armoured cars enjoyed a local success, as did the formations immediately to the north, where they pushed back elements of the Austro-Hungarian First Army.

As was normal practice, reserves were mobilised by the Austro-Hungarian commanders to mount counterattacks late on 4 June, and as darkness fell many of the Russian gains of the afternoon were reversed in Second Army's sector. A counterattack by First Army proved to be less effective; here, the contested area was a salient that had in any case been badly exposed to Russian fire, and the troops who retook the area in the first part of the night found themselves almost surrounded, and lost half their strength before they were able to withdraw.[176] But although the Russian attacks had largely been repulsed and the front line was almost back to where the battle had started, the Russian penetration would have important consequences. Worried that the Russians would renew their attacks and drive back the northern flank of Second Army, Böhm-Ermolli asked for reinforcements. Immediately, 25th Infantry Division – the main reserves of the neighbouring Fourth Army – was dispatched to the threatened area from its current location at Lutsk. The original intention was to use the division as a complete formation to recover all the positions that had been lost during the day, but Paul Puhallo, the commander of First Army, decided that there was little to be gained by such an attack – the heavy losses suffered attempting to recover the lost salient did not give any cause for confidence in further counterattacks, and in any case, the current front line looked rather less exposed.[177]

Lechitsky's Ninth Army also attacked on 4 June. The opposing forces, part of Pflanzer-Baltin's Seventh Army, were abundantly aware of the coming assault, and had prepared their defences opposite the Russian trenches that were encroaching towards their positions. Although four of the regular divisions that had repulsed the Russians and much of the heavy artillery that had been used with such good effect had been transferred to the Italian front, Seventh Army remained confident that the new bunkers that had been constructed since that attack would protect the defending infantry from Russian artillery fire, and any repeat Russian attack would be beaten off just as effectively as had been the case in January. Throughout 4 June, Lechitsky's gunners subjected the trenches of *Gruppe Benigni* to a detailed bombardment, and attempts to drive the defenders from cover with a mixture of gas released from cylinders and shells proved to have little effect. However, the new tactic of careful shelling of clear objectives with frequent pauses for observation began to bear fruit. The front line positions began to crumble, and the soldiers of 79th *Honvéd* Infantry Brigade – part of 42nd Infantry Division – suffered considerable losses; the brigade had been deployed in the front line on the eve of the Russian attack and was at full strength, as a result of which the bunkers that had been prepared by its precursor formation were too small and too few to provide protection for all the troops. At midday, the artillery fire suddenly stopped. The dazed reservists of 79th *Honvéd* Infantry Brigade were slow to man the firestep, and some were overwhelmed by the attacking Russian troops, many of whom had been waiting in their forward positions less than 100m from the Austro-Hungarian positions.

The January attacks had been smashed with judicious use of artillery, and Pflanzer-Baltin had intended to do the same this time. The guns of *Gruppe*


Southwest Front
Southern Sector, 4–9 June 1916

N
Hofmann XXX
54 XX
XXII XXX
39 XX
VI XXX
12 XX
XVI XXX
Strypa
Buczacz
36 XX
7th Army
2 XX
XIII XXX
Jazłowiek
II XXX
15 XX
II XXX
6 XX
Hadfy XXX
9th Army
XXXIII XXX
21 XX
Dniester
8 XX
XLI XXX
Doroschoutz
42 XX
7th Army
Benigni XXX
Okna
Czarny Potok
XI XXX
30 XX
XII XXX
Dobronoutz
3 XX
XII XXX
24 XX
Combined XXX
Front line 4 June
Front line 9 June
0
18 miles
0
30km

Benigni therefore opened fire as planned, but their effect was minimal – the Russians were no longer operating in dense formations, and in any case did not have to cross such a broad expanse of no-man's land before reaching the Austro-Hungarian lines. An additional problem was that many of the heavy batteries that had contributed so much to the defensive effort in January were now in the Alps. The defending infantry was rapidly overwhelmed, with fewer than 700 of

79th *Honvéd* Infantry Brigade escaping. The Russians – largely from XI Corps – took over 7,000 prisoners. After pausing for breath, they pressed on, overrunning four Austro-Hungarian artillery batteries before the end of the day.[178] The village of Dobronoutz changed hands several times as Feldmarschallleutnant Siegmund Benigni's reserves attempted counterattacks to restore the situation. Closer to the Dniester, immediately to the north, the first Russian attacks were beaten off. However, as worrying reports of the Russian advance to Dobronoutz began to arrive, the defensive lines came under pressure again, and the attackers succeeded in getting a small foothold in the defences immediately south of the Dniester. Before they could be driven out, they widened their penetration and rapidly dispersed the defenders, killing many and taking over 4,000 prisoners.[179] Suffering from influenza and struggling with a high fever, Pflanzer-Baltin struggled to keep up with events, relying upon Theodor von Zeynek, his chief of staff, to act as an intermediary much of the time.[180]

The speed of the Russian advance – together with the news that several gun batteries had been overrun – resulted in many artillery formations pulling out precipitately. As a result, when reinforcements were committed for local counterattacks later in the afternoon, they were unsupported and failed to make any impression. Nevertheless, they were able to restore a continuous front line, albeit some distance to the rear of the positions from which they had intended to smash the Russian advance. Most of the Austro-Hungarian formations that had fought during the day were badly intermingled, and it was doubtful that they would be able to put up much meaningful resistance the following day. Despite his illness, Pflanzer-Baltin struggled back to his headquarters to take command of the rapidly deteriorating situation. By the end of the day, the reserves that he had intended to be used in a cohesive and coherent manner had been frittered away, and *Gruppe Benigni* had lost a third of its artillery to the Russians, with many other guns destroyed to prevent them from falling into Russian hands.[181]

The first day of the Russian offensive was over, and the only point of the line where the Russians had made substantial progress was against Seventh Army's *Gruppe Benigni*, but the battle had only just commenced, as the chief of staff of X Corps later wrote:

> The isolated Russian infantry attacks that were carried out at the same time as the [artillery] bombardment and other measures such as the use of gas clearly had the purpose of driving the defending infantry from the shelter of their bunkers into the open fighting positions where they could be ground down by Russian artillery fire.

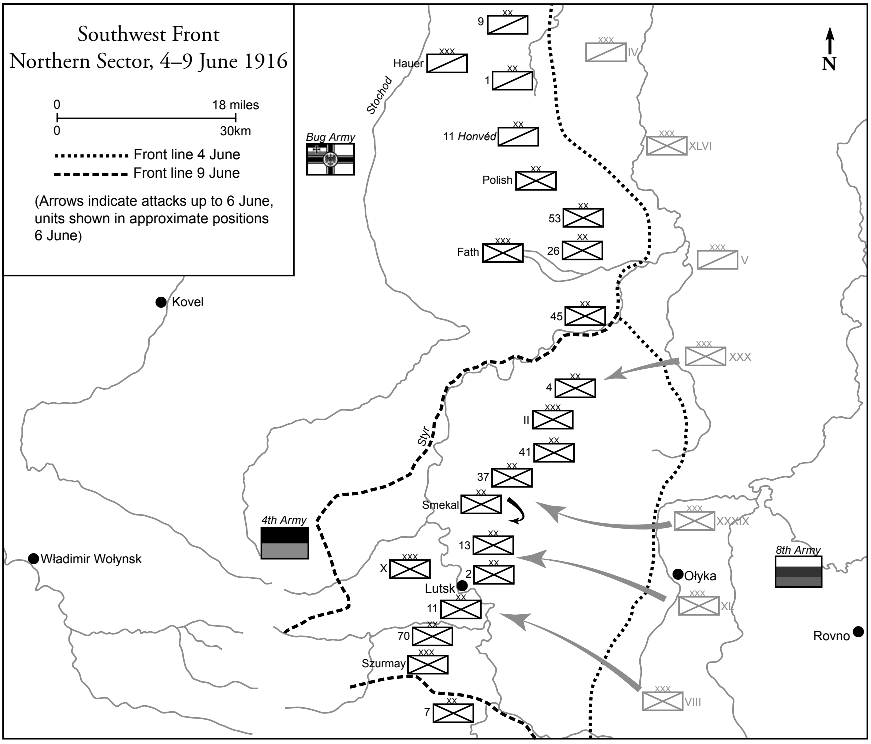
> In combination with the day's news from neighbouring corps and aerial reconnaissance, in particular the approach and preparation of Russian cavalry formations opposite the front of X and XXIV Corps, these considerations made it clear that the main Russian attack would be against X and XXIV Corps and would involve the sectors of 2nd and 70th Infantry Divisions.
>
> … The storm was expected to break early on 5 June.[182]

Nevertheless, the artillery bombardment had had considerable effect, as Winogradsky noted:

> [The defenders] were not accustomed to powerful Russian artillery preparation and based upon their experiences of 1915 – when our infantry attacked after a short bombardment, sometimes even before the shelling had ceased – they waited for the appearance of brown uniforms before their lines at any moment and became unsettled.
>
> The uncertainty of the moment of attack, made worse by the disagreeable experience of suffering losses in the trenches from the constant bombardment, wore them down. The prisoners taken the following day told us that after the commencement of the preparatory fire, they prepared to receive our attack, leaving their shelters, and deployed their reserves and needlessly departed from their planning, reducing their morale … we continued the destruction through the night with occasional shots to hinder attempts at repair. Expecting an attack in the darkness, the enemy showed constant signs of nervousness and fired illumination flares into the sky. Viewed from my observation post, the scene seemed completely calm, broken only by the well-spaced shots of our 76s.[183]

On the Russian side, most sectors had not made major penetrations, but nor had there been any devastating setbacks – with the exception of Lechitsky's drive immediately south of the Dniester, the infantry attacks launched to date amounted to no more than local probes designed to determine how effective the artillery preparation had been, and there had been no opportunity for defending artillery to inflict crushing casualties on massed infantry formations, as had occurred in the Russian attacks of January and March. The Austro-Hungarian defences had been significantly degraded, and it remained to be seen whether they would be able to hold in the face of further pressure.

Whatever doubts he may have had before the offensive began, Kaledin was now determined to press forward with his Eighth Army and intended to break through towards Lutsk; at this stage, he had no way of knowing that his task had



Southwest Front
Northern Sector, 4–9 June 1916

0
18 miles
0
30km
Front line 4 June
Front line 9 June
(Arrows indicate attacks up to 6 June, units shown in approximate positions 6 June)
N
9
Hauer
1
11 *Honvéd*
Polish
53
Fath
26
45
4
II
41
37
Smekal
13
X
2
Lutsk
11
70
Szurmay
7
Stochod
Styr
Bug Army
4th Army
Kovel
Władimir Wołynsk
IV
XLVI
V
XXX
XXXIX
Ołyka
XL
VIII
8th Army
Rovno

been made considerably easier by the dispatch of 25th Infantry Division to the south. There were further probing attacks by Russian infantry through the night that made no significant gains, but forced X Corps to commit almost all its reserves. Concerned that this might leave Martiny's corps with no ability to react to further developments, Joseph Ferdinand began to parcel out the reserves held by Fourth Army to his subordinate formations. If the battle had developed in the same manner as the encounters at Czernowitz, the Strypa and Lake Naroch earlier in the year, this would probably have been a reasonable policy. However, the battalions and brigades that were now committed arrived at the front line piecemeal, and they were sent forward without all their artillery – several batteries were retained by Fourth Army. Moreover, almost no arrangements were made for ammunition columns to accompany the reinforcements; the limited artillery support sent forward with the reserves would be almost completely dependent upon the formations they were reinforcing for supplies of ammunition.

As soon as it grew light enough on 5 June for artillery observers to be able to direct fire, the Russian gunners resumed their careful demolition work of the defences of Joseph Ferdinand's Fourth Army, and some Russian artillery batteries now switched to firing gas shells at the positions of their Austro-Hungarian counterparts. Under cover of the shelling, Russian infantry worked their way closer and attempted to break into the defensive positions; in many areas, they were unable to secure a foothold, but there were significant penetrations in 2nd Infantry Division's sector, at the southern end of X Corps. Exhausted by repeated pauses in the Russian bombardment, the defenders were slow to man their defences and did not detect the approaching Russian infantry through the smoke and dust, not least because the Russians were not using the massed tactics that had marked almost every previous battle. Many of the defenders emerged from their bunkers to find the Russians were already in their trenches; others were killed when the assault groups from the Russian XL Corps hurled grenades into the bunkers.[184] One soldier later recalled how quickly one event followed another as the positions were overrun:

> It was only five seconds after it stopped that those in the bunkers of the foremost trenches of 82nd Infantry Regiment realised the shelling was no longer directed at them, because their ears were still ringing. One second later, an energetic defender shouted to man the trenches. Another second and he bumped into someone on the steps, and a grenade bounced towards him from under the splintered, shattered low balcony. In the eighth second, a voice shouted from above that the men should surrender. Further resistance was pointless.[185]

Much of the front line held by the Austro-Hungarian 2nd Infantry Division was overrun, but worse was to follow. The second line of trenches was manned by troops of 25th Rifle Brigade, and they could not see clearly through the smoke to determine what was happening in the front line; as their positions began to come under Russian mortar and howitzer fire, further assault groups of Russian infantry now suddenly appeared before them. Martiny had intended to use the brigade – together with other reinforcements – to launch a deliberate counterattack to restore the front line, but instead a desperate fight for the second line broke out. To make matters worse, disaster overtook another division that had been sent to Martiny as reinforcements by Joseph Ferdinand; the headquarters of 13th Rifle Division came under sudden Russian artillery bombardment and was temporarily rendered *hors de combat*, leaving the division rudderless at a critical moment. Brusilov's revolutionary plans for artillery fire to include accurate disruption of reserves and lines of communication were proving to be extremely effective.

Throughout these key moments of the battle, Martiny's headquarters was struggling to keep up with events. It was assumed that the planned counterattack to recapture the foremost positions was under way, and when news arrived in the early afternoon that the second line had been held, albeit at the cost of substantial casualties, there was considerable dismay. Further bad news arrived in a steady stream. Artillery ammunition was almost exhausted, with many guns being withdrawn as they ran out of shells; without their support, further counterattacks stood no chance of success, and it would be increasingly difficult to disrupt advancing Russian infantry. The staff of 13th Rifle Division finally reached X Corps Headquarters at 3 p.m., an hour after the entire division had been expected to launch its counterattack. The best that could now be expected was to shore up the situation.[186]

From his distant headquarters, Linsingen now attempted to intervene. He ordered Fourth Army to stop deploying its reserves piecemeal, and to organise them for a formal counterattack to restore the situation. In addition, he demanded details of why elements of X Corps had abandoned their 'impregnable' positions.[187] The personal friction between him and Joseph Ferdinand had been a source of difficulty for much of the year, but this latest intervention must have irritated the Austro-Hungarian archduke even more. Even if he had been inclined to listen to the German general under whom he clearly resented serving, it was too late: almost all of Fourth Army's reserves had been committed, and there was effectively nothing left with which a counterattack on the lines of Linsingen's suggestion might be organised.

For X Corps, time was running out as rapidly as artillery ammunition. Martiny spoke to Generalmajor Otto Berndt, chief of staff at Fourth Army Headquarters, by telephone in mid-afternoon, concluding:

> At present, it is impossible to recover the first line. It will only be possible to hold the second line if 40th Infantry Regiment is reinforced by 25th *Landwehr* Infantry Regiment immediately, which given the slow deployment of this regiment to date and the lateness of the hour is unlikely.
>
> I therefore propose the withdrawal of 2nd and 13th Infantry Divisions to the third line under my authority … The loss of ground is unimportant compared to the survival of our formations.[188]

Joseph Ferdinand's response, sent shortly after in writing, passed all responsibility to Martiny:

> The corps commander must do what he believes the situation demands, in accordance with his duty and conscience.[189]

Feldmarschallleutnant Sándor Szurmay's XXIV Corps further to the south was also under heavy pressure; the front line fortifications had been reduced to ruins by two days of accurate artillery fire, and bitter fighting raged as Szurmay threw in all his reserves in an attempt to prevent his men from being overrun. Contrary to Linsingen's instructions, Joseph Ferdinand felt he had no choice but to dispatch further elements of his diminishing reserves. Aware that Martiny's X Corps to his north was pulling back to the third line, Szurmay expressed doubt that 70th *Honvéd* Infantry Division on his northern flank could continue to hold its positions; the reality was that the Hungarian division was still fighting in the first line with considerable determination. It now received orders to fall back during the coming night to the third line, in order to ensure that continuity with X Corps to the north was maintained. Unfortunately, the orders did not arrive until 10 p.m. The first priority was to move the division's artillery to safety, an exercise that was hindered by rain during the night. Nevertheless, as dawn broke on 6 June, the survivors of the division safely reached the third line. They had managed to evacuate all their guns, but the fighting had been costly – from an initial strength on 4 June of 12,200 men, 70th *Honvéd* Infantry Division had been reduced to fewer than 5,400.[190]

Martiny's divisions had suffered similar losses, and in addition had been forced to abandon thirty-seven of their guns. In his account of the battle, X Corps' chief of staff certainly describes episodes of heavy fighting, but nothing severe or catastrophic enough to account for the loss of so many guns; it seems that at least some elements of the corps withdrew rather precipitately, abandoning weapons and other equipment in their haste. Nevertheless, they too managed to pull back to the third line, where they turned to face the Russians once more. However, with little or no artillery ammunition and after losing so many of their own guns, their ability to continue resistance was doubtful, particularly given their irresolute performance to date. A Russian thrust towards Lutsk had long been anticipated by Joseph Ferdinand and Linsingen, and 25th Infantry Division had therefore been stationed near the vital town to be available as reinforcements should such a thrust develop; however, that division had already been dispatched to the south, and Joseph Ferdinand had run out of reserves. He had no option but to swallow his pride and ask Linsingen for help. The only troops available were a handful of Austro-Hungarian and German battalions together with the artillery elements of 13th Rifle Division that Joseph Ferdinand had held back. Combined, these amounted to significantly less than a full division, and in any case were from disparate formations and had not fought together before. Under the command of Feldmarschallleutnant Smekal, they were to attack into the northern flank of the Russian advance. Late on 5 June, Joseph Ferdinand dispatched a staff officer to X Corps to investigate why it had not been possible to hold the 'impregnable' front line. Kralowetz von Hohenrecht, the chief of staff, could only reflect that it was disappointing that this was the first appearance at X Corps Headquarters of a representative of higher command, after two days of fighting:

> This was the focal point of the overall tactical attention during these days and there was good provision for reliable voice communication. But in some situations, the most accurate messages – X Corps made no attempt either to blacken or overgloss them – and the subsequent reports could not substitute for impressions gained by personal presence.[191]

After two days of careful artillery fire and infantry attacks, Kaledin was confident that success was close. His troops had overrun both the first and second lines of enemy defences, and had inflicted heavy losses on the Austro-Hungarian Fourth Army. By contrast with his enemies, Kaledin still had substantial fresh forces in reserve and ordered them to move forward; the opposing forces might have been able to pull back to their last line of defence without close pursuit, but Eighth Army put the pause to good use to bring up supplies and reinforcements. As their guns laboriously crossed the terrain, hindered by craters and trenches, Winogradsky and his men surveyed the battlefield:

> Seen as we passed, the trenches gave a very good impression: deep, constructed well and with care, reinforced with timbers, and with plenty of casemated shelters and solid machine-gun nests, they showed the magnitude of our success, achieved in a comparatively short time.
>
> As was to be expected, it was the infantry who had suffered the most. Our dead could be seen only in the narrow zone between our lines and those of the Austrians – in the barbed wire – lying with their heads facing forwards, victims of some machine-guns that had not been suppressed by the fire of our artillery. The enemy trenches contained almost no Russian dead, but instead were full of Austrians killed by the bayonet or by artillery fire and grenades. The shelters had suffered and were full of corpses, slaughtered by the large shells or – with the entrances blocked by the shelling prior to the attack – had succumbed to our grenadiers.
>
> … A funny story circulated: the neighbouring corps had captured a pretty opera singer, who had come from Lvov [Lemberg] to visit one of her 'friends' just before our bombardment. She escaped death but was blocked in some shelter and

> surrendered with the rest to the victors; I regret that I am unable to guarantee the authenticity of this story.[192]

At the southern end of the battlefield, the fighting centred on the key hill of Czarny Potok, which dominated the south bank of the Dniester. *Gruppe Benigni* held a small bridgehead over the river to the north of the hill, and Pflanzer-Baltin wanted this to be retained for as long as possible. Lechitsky had other ideas, and ordered his XI Corps forward; the Russians captured Czarny Potok in early fighting, and although the Austro-Hungarian counterattack later in the morning retook the position, the Russian troops were also busy widening their penetration to the south. Their advance was finally brought to a stop, but only by the commitment of almost all available reserves. For much of the day, Pflanzer-Baltin and Benigni continued to debate whether the latter's troops should try to hold their positions or should pull back towards the west; Lechitsky made the decision for them. During the afternoon, another Russian attack drove the defenders from Czarny Potok once more, making Benigni's positions impossible to hold. However, any withdrawal to the west was also difficult, as the Russians on the high ground would have clear line of sight over the retreating troops. As darkness fell, Benigni gathered together the remnants of two infantry regiments and threw them at Czarny Potok, briefly recapturing the summit. Immediately, the rest of *Gruppe Benigni* pulled back to the west; busy with their own troop movements, the Russians did not attempt to intervene.[193]

As he reviewed the opening two days of the offensive, Brusilov had reasons for satisfaction. On both flanks, his attacks were progressing well, and the numerical successes of the attack were already impressive: between them, the armies of Southwest Front claimed to have captured 49,000 prisoners and seventy-seven guns in the first two days of fighting.[194] But whilst the reports from the front line were encouraging, Brusilov received disheartening news from elsewhere; Alexeyev telephoned him to inform him that Evert's preparations had been delayed by bad weather, and West Front would not be ready to start its attack, already postponed once, until 18 June, five days later than planned. Concerned that any delay would give the Germans time and opportunity to move troops to stop his forces, Brusilov asked that Alexeyev ensure that there would be no further postponements beyond 18 June.

The fighting in the north on 5 June had been largely centred on Kaledin's drive against X Corps. The following day, the areas of intense fighting extended to the south. The soldiers of the Russian VIII Corps pursued the rearguard of Szurmay's 70th *Honvéd* Infantry Division as it withdrew to the third line of defences. They succeeded in retaining contact with the southern flank of the Hungarian formation, and a full-scale assault began shortly after 7 a.m. The defenders' artillery succeeded in driving off the first attack with the last of their shells, but holes began to appear in the line as the assaults continued. Szurmay dispatched his last reserves, 95th Infantry Regiment, but even as it moved forward it encountered unmistakable signs of disaster. The bulk of one of Szurmay's regiments surrendered, and another abandoned its positions even though it did not appear to be under any major threat. Consequently, Szurmay had no choice but to order the remnants of his corps to pull back towards the southwest, thus creating a gap in the line between his northern flank and the southern flank of Martiny's X Corps. Much of 95th Infantry Regiment was swept away in the growing rout before it could even get into action. The Russians now had a clear route to Lutsk, and Joseph Ferdinand reluctantly issued orders for Fourth Army to begin preparations for a withdrawal to the line of the River Styr.[195]

There was growing chaos everywhere. The commander of an infantry division in X Corps' sector was too ill to lead his men and one of his brigade commanders was ordered to replace him, but he in turn could not be found. Joseph Ferdinand had to try to improvise defensive lines that might hold up the Russians whilst fending off repeated instructions from Linsingen urging him to intervene personally to stiffen the resolve of his subordinate commanders; the German army group commander continued to believe that the original fortified line could still be held. In truth, both Joseph Ferdinand and Linsingen were losing touch with events; the Fourth Army commander continued to exhort Szurmay and Martiny to ensure that their corps remained in contact, when the reality was that a substantial gap was opening between them. With almost no artillery ammunition and his divisions beginning to disintegrate, Martiny ordered X Corps to pull back towards the Styr, only to receive a surprising response from Fourth Army Headquarters, as X Corps' chief of staff later recalled:

> 'Halt! Take up a curved line from Hill 254 to the high ground south of Chorlupy. Reinforcements are en route.'
>
> Reinforcements? Really? When will they actually appear? Questions that remained unanswered. Did it mean Feldmarschallleutnant Smekal and the 89th *Landwehr* Brigade, and the German *Brigade Jachmann*? These should have been in position by now, right by Romanow. But we had heard nothing from Feldmarschallleutnant Smekal, and nor did Fourth Army have any further information.[196]

Joseph Ferdinand had good reasons for wanting to stop the retreat: if Martiny's corps pulled back that far, it would expose the southern flank of II Corps to its north, and any lingering hope of assembling a force for a counterattack to restore the situation would be gone. But the stop order arrived too late – X Corps was already pulling back. Fortunately for the exhausted Austro-Hungarian troops, the Russians did not press them hard; after securing the abandoned third line of defences, Kaledin's Eighth Army paused for breath while reinforcements, supplies and artillery moved forward. However, a gap remained between X Corps and XXIV Corps, through which the road to Lutsk seemed invitingly open. A worried Martiny dispatched a captain with a cavalry patrol to determine exactly where his neighbour's troops had taken up positions.

In mid-afternoon, a message arrived from Szurmay, advising Martiny that his troops were in new positions, roughly half way between the original front line and the Styr valley. He was still unable to give the precise location of his northern flank, and in any case the reassuring report was swiftly overtaken by a more alarming one: the new line had already been forced by the advancing Russians. It had been another good day for Kaledin, with his men having far less heavy fighting than in the opening two days, and his corps commanders had put this opportunity to good use to reorganise their ranks and prepare for further advances. XL and VIII Corps were ordered to push on to Lutsk in order to complete the breakthrough, while the other formations of Eighth Army moved forward in conjunction. On the northern flank of Kaledin's army, Gillenschmidt would press forward with his cavalry.

By the end of 6 June, Szurmay's troops had pulled back to the Styr, some 10 miles (16km) west of where they had started the battle two days before. The rest of Fourth Army – X and II Corps – had been forced to pull back even greater distances. Everywhere, there was confusion as demoralised, exhausted soldiers pulled back to a series of bridgeheads on the east bank of the river, many of them without their officers, who had disappeared – some were dead, others had surrendered, but many had simply taken to their heels and abandoned their men. It was abundantly clear that Fourth Army would not be able to hold the new line of the river, completely unfortified, without substantial reinforcements, and orders arrived from *AOK* for Second Army to release its 29th Infantry Division. In addition, First Army pulled 46th Rifle Division out of the front line and made it available, and 25th Infantry Division – dispatched to the south from Lutsk at the beginning of the battle – was ordered to return to the north once it had finished helping to restore the battle lines of Second Army. At the same time, Linsingen began to mobilise German formations from the north; these would assemble under the command of General Friedrich von Bernhardi to launch powerful counterattacks as soon as possible.

Elsewhere in Brusilov's command, events were unfolding with mixed results. During the afternoon of 6 June, Sakharov's Eleventh Army attacked again to the west of Tarnopol, but failed to make any impression. With the southern half of his army unable to make any progress, Sakharov turned his attention to the northern half of Eleventh Army, attacking at the seam of the Austro-Hungarian First and Second Armies, but once more was beaten off. At the extreme southern end of the front, the Russian troops who had fought so hard for possession of the high ground at Czarny Potok only discovered that *Gruppe Benigni* had withdrawn at first light; when they probed forwards, they found that Benigni had put the respite to good use, reorganising his formations, moving artillery down from his northern flank and extracting battalions from the front line to form local reserves. The fortuitous arrival of fresh drafts from the homeland allowed the battered 79th *Honvéd* Infantry Brigade to be brought up to an adequate numerical strength, though its fragility remained a concern.[197]

At midday, Lechitsky's troops tried again, with Mikhail Alexandrovich Barantsov's XI Corps attempting to force a way through the new battle line. This sector was held by the Austro-Hungarian 3rd Cavalry Division, and bitter fighting continued through the day, with little ground changing hands; in places, the Russians were even driven from the trenches they had captured the previous day. Many Austro-Hungarian commanders reported that their men were approaching the end of their strength, but fortunately for Pflanzer-Baltin and his shaken troops, Lechitsky had to pause for breath. His own casualties had been substantial, with 13,000 dead or wounded, nearly all of them suffered when attempting to exploit initial successes without the meticulous artillery preparation of the preliminary attacks.[198] It was time to bring forward artillery, ammunition and other supplies.

Shcherbachev's Seventh Army, immediately to the north of Lechitsky's Ninth Army, intended to attack with its southern flank, largely composed of the infantry of II Corps. The Austro-Hungarian line was held by 15th Infantry Division, and for the first two days its positions came under the same careful, precise artillery bombardment that was such a feature of Brusilov's offensive. On 6 June, Russian infantry probed forward and a tough battle began with the Russians making slow progress. Eventually, the Russians pushed perhaps a mile (1.5km) into the Austro-Hungarian positions on a front of 2 miles (3km), but the troops in the salient that had been created found themselves under heavy flanking fire and were driven to ground. Both sides had lost about 6,000 men, and Shcherbachev decided to pause while his artillery moved up to provide better support. It had been Shcherbachev's intention to adopt the French system of neighbouring units helping lever their flanking formations forward in stages, and attacks using this technique took place at the northern end of the Russian Seventh Army; unlike Brusilov's new tactics, they failed completely, and the losses suffered here contributed to the need for Shcherbachev to pause in the south rather than pushing forward again.

From his headquarters a considerable distance from the front line, Linsingen continued to try to impose his will upon his army group. His relationship with Joseph Ferdinand had never been good, and it now disintegrated completely. As more reports arrived of the losses suffered by Fourth Army, Linsingen demanded the replacement of Martiny as commander of X Corps, and of Joseph Ferdinand himself. In addition, he insisted that Böhm-Ermolli's Second Army, which had yet to come under heavy pressure, should send additional reserves to try to restore the situation east of Lutsk. Conrad had already appealed to Falkenhayn for reinforcements from the German sector of the Eastern Front, but had no success. As Falkenhayn later wrote, moving troops south was no simple matter, and would first require a withdrawal to a shorter front line:

> The simplest way of dealing with the situation appeared to be to concentrate hastily a strong German army group in Poland, West Galicia, or Hungary, and proceed to a counterattack with far-reaching aims. The Austrian General Staff strongly recommended this proposal. But however attractive this idea appeared in theory, it was barely possible in practice.
>
> The great superiority of the enemy on the German portion of the Eastern Front has already been referred to. Apart from the surpassing efficiency of the German troops, the equilibrium could only be maintained if those troops were supported by really well built positions supplied with an abundance, but not a deadweight, of mobile material. There were no such positions further back, and on that account, for us to withdraw our front with a view to shortening it in order to release troops, promised no results … Lastly, the technical difficulties of evacuating the present front, in the face of an enemy with threefold superiority in numbers, and even then crouching to spring, were so formidable that we shrank from the idea.
>
> This group [to launch a counteroffensive to restore the situation] could only have been formed by bringing very strong forces simultaneously from the west. This would involve delay during which the last line of resistance left to the Austrians in the east would be broken down. It would, in fact, have been necessary

> to carry on the war against Russia without our allies. For this, however, the troops available from the west were inadequate even if it were decided to withdraw behind the Meuse or to the frontier. Even a constant shifting of the centre of gravity of our attack could never compensate for the disadvantages which must inevitably follow such a sudden cessation of our pressure in the west.
>
> The proposal of *AOK* therefore could not be accepted.[199]

Nevertheless, Falkenhayn had to do something: if the *k.u.k.* Army suffered a decisive defeat, the Austro-Hungarian Empire might be forced out of the war. By 1916, the war aims of the two allies were very different. Germany remained committed to fighting on until victory was achieved over all its foes, whereas Austria-Hungary was prepared to consider a compromise peace that allowed Franz Joseph's empire to concentrate on its internal problems. It was feared in Berlin that if suitable terms were offered, Vienna would leave Germany to fight on alone, a burden that was simply too heavy to be borne. Discussions began in earnest on how to proceed in order to avoid such an eventuality.

At *AOK*, Conrad cannot have been surprised when his request for additional German forces was rejected. He had to make a decision regarding Linsingen's demands for change of command at X Corps and Fourth Army, and he approved the former, but deferred the latter on the pretext that he had to consult Vienna.

On 7 June, Kaledin resumed his push towards Lutsk. At first light, several infantry formations attacked the northern flank of the Austro-Hungarian Fourth Army in an attempt to open the way for Gillenschmidt's cavalry to raid deep to the west; most of these attacks failed to drive off the Austro-Hungarian defenders. Elsewhere however, the new front line once more began to give way and Joseph Ferdinand looked desperately to Smekal's improvised division for relief. The intention was to attack with this division in X Corps' sector, and at 10 a.m. Smekal finally moved forward, supported by 37th *Honvéd* Infantry Division. The latter was soon forced to halt when it ran into part of the Russian XL Corps, and shortly after Smekal too found that his formations had been driven to ground. By early afternoon, the Hungarian reservists of 37th *Honvéd* Infantry Division were withdrawing, leaving the rest of Smekal's group with no choice but to pull back. The counterattack that had been intended to restore the front line had barely made any impression at all.

The key battlefield in the north was before Lutsk itself. Here, the Austro-Hungarian forces occupied a bridgehead on the east bank of the Styr, holding positions that had first been constructed during the fighting in late 1915. Although the positions were comparatively strong, their fatal flaw was that they were overlooked by high ground to the east and south, much of which was now in Russian hands. The positions had not been occupied for most of 1916 and there was tall grass and corn in front of them, preventing the defenders from having a clear field of fire. Matters were worsened by command problems – the boundary between X Corps and Szurmay's XXIV Corps ran through the middle of the bridgehead.

The Russians had been in two minds about how to proceed as they approached Lutsk:

> We found ourselves facing a dilemma: whether to halt and begin the slow and methodical preparation for an attack on this second entrenched zone [around Lutsk], which would have allowed the enemy to bring up reinforcements, or to profit from our superiority, the magnificent élan of the troops, and to try to force the line of the Styr without delay after a short preparation before the Austrians dug in again, and to use the methods of a battle of manoeuvre. The high command was inclined towards the second solution and General Sokholov [the commander of Winogradsky's 14th Infantry Division] quickly went forward with me to Hill 110 to reconnoitre the terrain. After familiarising himself with the layout, he decided to turn the Austrian left flank with the 55th Regiment, while the 53rd and 54th attacked from the front … By midday preparations were in full swing, but we had neither the time nor the required ammunition (particularly for the howitzers) to create breaches in the barbed wire. The attack was to be at 3 p.m., to reach the Styr before darkness. Our caissons were full but the munitions columns were incomplete; given the speed of advance it had not been possible for the munitions depots in the rear to reach us.[200]

Unaware that his dismissal had been approved, Martiny assigned Feldmarschallleutnant Edmund Sellner as bridgehead commander, but he had no authority over the elements of XXIV Corps in the southern part of the bridgehead. The junction between the two Austro-Hungarian corps came under growing pressure from the Russian VIII Corps throughout the morning, and soon the entire bridgehead was under artillery fire. Aware of Linsingen's demands for resistance, Joseph Ferdinand wished the bridgehead to be held if at all possible, but during the afternoon a report arrived from Martiny's X Corps:

> All [of X Corps'] infantry division commanders report that the troops are utterly exhausted and although they are still keeping up resistance, an enemy penetration during the night can hardly be resisted.

> As such an event would leave only disjointed remnants and would obviously lead to loss of *matériel*, I request a decision on whether resistance to the bitter end is required, as I am unable to assess the overall situation.
>
> A decision is urgently required.[201]

Joseph Ferdinand was – quite literally – in no position to give a swift decision. Aware that Lutsk was threatened, he had ordered his own headquarters to abandon the city and move west, making it almost impossible for him to retain control of the battlefield. Meanwhile, X Corps' combat engineers began preparations for the demolition of the bridges linking the bridgehead with the west bank. Martiny's frustration and sense of confusion must have worsened when he received a message not long afterwards from Smekal, advising him that the improvised division was preparing to attack the Russians in order to allow 37th *Honvéd* Infantry Division to withdraw, and would then follow it in a line of retreat to the northwest, in other words away from the bridgehead at Lutsk. Martiny and his staff had no knowledge of any retreat by 37th *Honvéd* Infantry Division, and even as they attempted to discover what was happening, news arrived that the combined forces of this division and Smekal's improvised division were already withdrawing to the northwest, leaving a substantial gap between them and the northern flank of the Austro-Hungarian 13th Infantry Division. Finally, orders arrived from Joseph Ferdinand:

> It is essential that Smekal's right flank maintains the closest possible contact with the northern wing of 13th Infantry Division, thus ensuring that no gap develops here …
>
> I call on all subordinate commanders to bear in mind the inevitable consequences of a further retreat. The enemy is not superior to us and in any case is exhausted by his repeated attacks. In contrast, strong forces will be going into action on our side as soon as possible.[202]

Leaving aside the bland assurances that the Russians were exhausted and strong reinforcements were about to intervene, the orders failed to take account of the gap that already existed between Smekal's division and 13th Infantry Division. And in the midst of this confusion, a messenger arrived at X Corps Headquarters from Feldmarschallleutnant Sellner, who had earlier been tasked with the command of the bridgehead west of Lutsk, and informed Martiny that he had been dismissed. To add to the chaos, it was not clear at first who would take command in Martiny's place, with Smekal designated as at least the temporary commander. Martiny's chief of staff, Kralowetz, was also to lose his post; his replacement would be Oberstleutnant Rásky, who would be unlikely to arrive to take up his duties until 13 June. Sellner, who was suffering from a fever, would take command until Smekal arrived.[203]

It was a bitter blow to Martiny and Kralowetz, who insisted that they had done everything possible to prevent disaster. The reality was that their divisions had fought with varying levels of resolution, but they could claim with some justification that their best formations had been withdrawn before the beginning of the battle, and that their requests for adequate supplies of artillery ammunition were repeatedly ignored. However, despite the insistence of Kralowetz in his memoirs that Martiny and his staff had done everything in their power to prepare the defensive positions of X Corps, far too many formations within the corps had broken apart at the first sign of Russian pressure.

The first task was to locate Smekal and make him aware of his new command. His first orders were issued late in the afternoon: the Lutsk bridgehead was to be held at all costs, with X Corps Headquarters a short distance to the west of Lutsk. Kralowetz couldn't help but note that until these orders arrived, it had never been the intention of the headquarters staff to leave Lutsk while the corps' troops were still fighting in and east of the city.[204]

In Teschen, Conrad finally agreed to the dismissal of Archduke Joseph Ferdinand. He had wanted to dismiss him the previous year, and there was clearly no love lost between the two men, but in the face of demands from Linsingen, who was universally disliked amongst senior Austro-Hungarian officers, Conrad had prevaricated as long as he could. In mid-afternoon, a message arrived at Fourth Army Headquarters confirming the change; the new commander was Generaloberst Karl von Tersztyánsky.

Joseph Ferdinand had started the war as a corps commander, and in the aftermath of the disastrous fighting in Galicia in the opening weeks had been promoted to command Fourth Army. This promotion was a typically messy affair. Moritz von Auffenberg, who led Fourth Army into the war, had performed well at the Battle of Komarów before he was trapped between two Russian armies and driven back in disorder; Joseph Ferdinand's corps had also been caught in the same trap, largely created through the errors of Conrad in *AOK*, and he had found himself struggling with irreconcilable orders to fight the Russian forces that were closing in on him. Auffenberg was not popular with Archduke Frederick, the nominal head of the army, and Conrad had agreed to Auffenberg's dismissal even though he and Auffenberg had been close friends for many years. Although his corps had been just as badly outfought as the rest of Fourth Army, Joseph Ferdinand had emerged from the incident with his reputation intact, even enhanced, and had been promptly appointed as Auffenberg's replacement. Since that date, his leadership of Fourth Army had been competent at best, and in his first real crisis he was found wanting. Aged only 43, he now retired to his estates in Austria. His replacement, Tersztyánsky, was one of the very few Austro-Hungarian commanders to emerge from the disasters in Serbia in 1914 with any credit, and should have commanded the Austro-Hungarian Third Army during the 1915 invasion, but was moved aside following a major row with Hungarian officials. After languishing on leave for much of the time that followed, he was now appointed to command Fourth Army, at least partly because Conrad wished to have a commander who would be blunt and robust enough to stand up to German senior officers like Linsingen.

Winogradsky watched as the Russian assault against the bridgehead on the east bank of the Styr at Lutsk began:

> At precisely 3 p.m., our infantry attacked eagerly in extended lines up a gentle slope and reached the defensive line where they were stopped by machine-gun fire. Twice more our infantry, supported by reserves, threw themselves forward, but failed with heavy losses. The artillery observers crawled forward to just under the wire to locate the machine-guns, but they were too numerous and well positioned to be destroyed in such a short space of time. At 5 p.m., General Sokholov threw in his last reserves to turn Kroupy Hill from the south, but this attack also foundered at the barbed wire. The situation was becoming terrible, the reserves were exhausted, there was nobody left to lead the infantry who were pinned down in front of the defences. XXXII Corps on our left had still not appeared. The artillery had to keep firing – carefully, to avoid hitting our own men – at the enemy's first line to suppress his fire and possible counterattacks. Everyone was in a bad humour, a real check after the success of yesterday!
>
> We had already received orders … to pull back the advanced elements on the enemy wire after dusk and to retrench behind the closest fold of land, when I was telephoned by the 4th Finnish Regiment to say that their observers could see the men of the 54th and 56th Regiments infiltrating under the barbed wire, cutting it and advancing little by little. I was hesitant about believing this good news, but it was confirmed within five minutes … and within 15 minutes there could be no doubt: the crisis had turned in our favour across the entire sector of the division. Our soldiers had found sufficient élan to make one last effort and after rushing the defences under machine-gun fire, they threw themselves on the Austrians. Meanwhile, we had reduced our artillery fire, and there could be no doubt about the outcome of the battle: the enemy was in full retreat, which degenerated

> rapidly into precipitate flight. Our batteries immediately took aim to fire a barrage against the Austrian bridges.[205]

The bridgehead was now untenable. Disorder grew as troops attempted to cross to the west, often without orders. Some artillery batteries abandoned the fight and did not stop until they reached Sokal, about 48 miles (80km) to the southwest. Despite constant urging from Linsingen to hold on at all costs, officers in the front line felt the task was hopeless; the chief of staff of 11th Infantry Division, part of Szurmay's XXIV Corps, reported in the early evening that 'It is a disaster. Our troops no longer count for anything.'[206] The Russian XL and VIII Corps steadily increased pressure on the perimeter, with sufficient artillery moving forward to commence a detailed preparation for what was expected to be a decisive infantry attack. Amidst a summer rainstorm, orders were issued to destroy some of the bridges over the Styr as the southern part of the bridgehead was abandoned, but the demolition charges did not function as intended, and attempts to set the bridges ablaze were frustrated by the rainfall.

Bowing to reality, Fourth Army Headquarters signalled Linsingen's chief of staff that a retreat behind the Styr was inevitable. By the time permission for the withdrawal was granted at 7.20 p.m., the retreat was already unstoppable. The premature demolition of some of the river crossings ensured that many of the remaining elements of X Corps were forced to surrender, while others died attempting to swim across the relatively narrow but deep river. The southern flank of 7th Infantry Division, at the very southern end of Fourth Army's forces, found itself driven back against a section of the Styr where there were no crossings at all, and an entire regiment – over 2,100 men – surrendered as darkness fell.

Lutsk had been a hub for the *k.u.k.* Army since it moved into the area in the late summer of 1915. Although the city had not suffered major damage at the time of its occupation, hundreds of its residents died during the following winter from a typhus outbreak. Now, thousands of civilians sheltered in their dwellings as best they could as X Corps abandoned its last positions. At 8 p.m., elements of the Russian 15th Infantry Division occupied the city, which was largely on the east bank of the Styr, enclosed in a loop of the river. Many tons of military supplies, crowds of leaderless soldiers and abandoned guns littered the streets. In places, the Russians were able to secure crossings over the river. An officer with the *k.u.k.* Army later described the destruction of some of Fourth Army's stores in vivid detail:

> It grew threatening in Lutsk, shaking, cracking and thundering. Great columns of smoke towered into the sky. Pressure waves from exploding munitions warehouses

> lifted roofs off the houses. Shutters split and rained down in splinters onto the streets. The munitions dumps whose walls were built from hundreds of old trees went up in flames … All of the wonderful white flour, hay, straw, bread, meat, and whatever else lay in these buildings, sufficient to feed thousands … all the fruits of countless days of labouring by innumerable people, assembled with such care and effort, were destroyed.[207]

The losses suffered by Fourth Army were substantial. Of the three divisions that fought in the Lutsk bridgehead – 2nd and 13th Infantry Divisions from X Corps and 11th Infantry Division from XXIV Corps – the Russians estimated that only 2,000 escaped to the west, from an original strength of 61,000. Kaledin's formations claimed a haul of over 44,000 prisoners and sixty-six guns.[208] Far from being able to hold a bridgehead on the east bank as Linsingen had repeatedly ordered, it was doubtful whether Fourth Army now had sufficient strength remaining to defend the line of the Styr. The deep river should have formed a very strong defensive position, but the numerical losses – particularly of prisoners – were so high that the sectors assigned to each formation could not be manned adequately. The casualties suffered to date by Kaledin's Eighth Army amounted to about 32,000 dead and wounded – certainly not light, but acceptable given that the attacking troops had had to fight their way through three lines of extensively prepared defences. It should be remembered that the first day of fighting at Lake Naroch had cost a far higher figure without even making a significant dent in the German positions.

Further south, Shcherbachev's Seventh Army renewed its battle with the Austro-Hungarian 15th Infantry Division. It had been Pflanzer-Baltin's intention to attack in an attempt to recover the stretch of front line that had been lost the previous day, but the Russians struck first with several probing attacks. These were sufficient to disrupt preparations for the Austro-Hungarian attack, and the Russian artillery now began another careful preparation, gradually breaking up the second line positions of the defences. At midday, the Russian infantry moved forward once more and took the ruins of Jazłowiek in bitter fighting; more importantly, the attackers also secured the high ground to the north and south of the village, limiting the ability of the defenders to defeat the attack with flanking fire. Desperately, the Austro-Hungarian XIII Corps attempted to restore the situation by rushing all its reserves to the area, but once again the Russians seized the initiative. Rather than languishing in the rear while the infantry struggled forward, several squadrons of Russian cavalry with infantry in support attacked the thin line of defences that was forming to the west of Jazłowiek. Some determined pockets of resistance fought on, but many of 15th Infantry Division's formations broke and streamed away in rout. By early afternoon, the Russians had reached the Strypa and had increased their haul in this sector to more than 9,000 prisoners.

Pflanzer-Baltin was now faced with an impossible dilemma. In order to prevent the collapse of *Gruppe Benigni*, he had transferred troops and artillery from the north of his army, and now the northern wing had suffered a breakthrough. With no other resources available, Pflanzer-Baltin ordered Benigni to release forces that could be used to restore XIII Corps' line along the Strypa, west of Jazłowiek. But the size of the setback was growing steadily, with neighbouring formations falling back to the Strypa in an attempt to maintain a continuous line. It remained to be seen whether this would be enough to prevent further Russian advances, or even whether the breach west of Jazłowiek could be sealed.

The first four days of Brusilov's offensive were over. At two points – Lutsk and Jazłowiek – important breakthroughs had been achieved, while elsewhere substantial pressure had been exerted, preventing troops from being shuffled north and south. Brusilov's revolutionary tactics had been stunningly successful: artillery had been used with a precision that was unprecedented; infantry had worked their way close to the defences before launching their attacks; and those attacks had not used the traditional lines of men that were so easy for machine-guns and defensive artillery to destroy. Losses had not been light, but were acceptable in view of the damage inflicted upon the Austro-Hungarian defenders. Indeed, a very large proportion of Russian losses occurred when the new tactics were ignored in attempts to press forward at greater tempo.

Writing after the battle, Kralowetz tried to analyse the reasons for the Russian success against X Corps:

> Both the troops and positions survived the [initial] bombardment without major damage. Numerical losses were barely worth mentioning as the shellproof bunkers, aside from a few collapses, provided good protection against shellfire and in this respect were fit for purpose. Similarly the damage to positions and obstacles was not adequate to render any defence questionable. Even where all positions had been turned into a field of craters, the positions remained defensible so long as the troops remained in their protected positions. But remaining in bunkers was only possible so long as there was no determined infantry attack against the more open positions.
>
> Therefore, the shelling – in particular the heavy bombardment before the Russian penetration on 5 June – cannot in itself be regarded as the cause of the unexpected Russian success.

> It was a different matter when a decisive infantry attack required the defenders to man the open trenches. In this case, fully concentrated heavy artillery fire on the unprotected positions was devastating and facilitated determined infantry assaults across the damaged obstacle belts, even when the defenders moved from the bunkers to their fighting positions in a timely manner. In addition, the Russian infantry encroached in places very close to the obstacle line in preparation for the assault, and furthermore the defenders were disastrously surprised by the unexpected clouds of smoke and sand, which literally blinded them for several minutes. In addition, this was accompanied by widespread malfunctions of guns due to the sand and dust.[209]

In other words, all of the novel tactics devised by Brusilov and his subordinates – careful artillery preparation and the encroachment of attacking infantry to the closest possible point before the commencement of the attack – had been hugely effective.

This immediately calls into question whether officers like Martiny and Kralowetz could have done more to improve matters for their men. The bunkers in which the men sheltered during the preparatory Russian bombardments had been designed as a result of experiences in the winter, where substantial losses had been suffered from inadequate protection. However, no consideration had been given to the fact that the deeper and therefore better protected the bunker, the longer it would take infantry to move to their fighting positions. In mitigation, it should be pointed out that all Russian attacks prior to June 1916 had involved a suitably long pause between the end of the artillery bombardment and the commencement of the infantry attack, but the energetic sapping activity of the Russians prior to the offensive should have warned the defenders that in the coming battle, there would be far less time to get men to the firesteps. The advanced trenches that the Russians had constructed through April and May should also have been attacked more energetically in order to hinder their development, and at the very least the defensive artillery plan should have included a detailed bombardment of all such positions to disrupt any Russian attack. Instead, Austro-Hungarian officers were content to believe complacently in the strength of their positions, from which they expected to repel any Russian attack with ease.

Kralowetz was also wrong to conclude that the defences were largely intact when the Russians attacked. In reality, the careful preparatory fire of the Russian artillery had destroyed trenches, fortified positions and strongpoints from where fire could be directed against the flanks of a Russian advance, and there was no repetition of the Naroch battles, where thousands of Russian corpses were left hanging on intact barbed wire entanglements. The success of the Russian bombardment was at many levels. Defences were destroyed without churning up the ground and making it almost impassable. The repeated pauses and resumptions of fire were actually necessary for assessment of damage inflicted, but they proved to be hugely damaging for the resolve of the defenders; those who had assumed a Russian attack was imminent and had ventured out into their fighting positions often found themselves under fire when the bombardment resumed, with the result that with each repetition, fewer and fewer men showed any inclination to emerge from the safety of their bunkers. Eventually, when the Russian infantry attacked, the defenders merely ran out into a hail of fire and hand grenades, and most surrendered en masse.

The collapse of morale amongst the defenders was remarkable, but not entirely unpredictable. The ability of the *k.u.k.* Army to withstand serious blows had been shown on many occasions to be suspect, and this was no exception. Throughout 1915, the Germans had repeatedly come to the conclusion that their allies were only reliable when they were closely supported by German troops, and whilst Linsingen's irritation and anger at events seems to border on arrogance, there was considerable justification for his point of view, and almost all German officers on the Eastern Front would have agreed with his attitude: *k.u.k.* officers had shown little resolve or leadership, and in the absence of this, it was absurd to expect lower ranks to resist.

The view of German officers was almost universally that the Russian successes were due to failures on the part of the *k.u.k.* Army – there was no recognition at this stage that the Russians had used new tactics. Hoffmann's diary in early June rejoiced in apparent progress in the fighting at Verdun and the initial assessment that the naval Battle of Jutland had been a German triumph (with more British ships lost than German ships), but then wrote on 6 June:

> After all the cheering military developments of the last few days, today there was another dampener. The Austrians have allowed themselves to be thrashed yet again by the Russians at Rovno [east of Lutsk]. Linsingen, in whose army group this has happened, has sent an indignant report. The entire Russian reserve stands before us [in the north] and in Galicia the Austrians have numerical superiority [not correct] … It is an endless scandal. There are of course hand-wringing calls for help from Teschen to Mézières [the current location of *OHL*] and from there the question [is passed on to *Ober Ost*]: what could we offer? In good conscience we can't give anything, at best we can help out a little. Therefore help must come from the west …[210]

The following day, Hoffmann added:

> It is the same old story: the Austrian Fourth Army retreats wherever it is attacked. It matters not that the army commander is an archduke.[211]

Writing after the war, with the benefit of hindsight, Hoffmann attempted to allocate blame differently, though he still gave little credit to the Russians for their victory:

> The Austro-Hungarian attack in Italy caused the Russians, in response to a request made by the Italians, to bring the intended auxiliary attack on the Austro-Hungarian front before they had intended, and it unexpectedly brought the Russians the most brilliant victory they had in the whole campaign. When, on 4 June, the Russians, who were numerically scarcely superior to the Austro-Hungarian troops, and who had neither concentrated their forces at any special point for the attack, nor made any great artillery preparation for it, fell upon Fourth Army at Lutsk and Seventh [Army] in Bukovina, both these armies gave way helplessly without offering any serious resistance. The retreat of Fourth Army, more especially, soon assumed the character of a rout. Unfortunately the leadership of General von Linsingen and his chief of staff Stoltzmann was not equal to the situation; it entirely failed, and was mainly the cause of the greatness of this disaster.[212]

Nor did Ludendorff make any recognition in his memoirs of the innovative nature of the Russian attacks; rather, he adhered to the standard German orthodoxy that the weakness of their ally had placed yet another burden upon the shoulders of the German Army.[213]

However, it should be remembered that despite the substantial losses suffered by the Austro-Hungarian armies, the Russians had not made huge territorial gains. Within the Russian establishment, there was caution about what had been achieved, as General Mikhail Alexeyevich Belyaev, a senior staff officer responsible, amongst other things, for the procurement of weaponry for the army from overseas and close supporter of the tsar and tsarina, told the French ambassador, Maurice Paléologue:

> When we returned to the main drawing-room … I asked him:
>
> 'What stage of the war have we reached, and what impressions are you carrying away with you?'

> Weighing his words well, he replied:
>
> 'The Emperor is as firm as ever in his determination to continue this war until our complete victory, that is, until Germany is compelled to accept our terms – all our terms. What His Majesty was good enough to tell me, when I made my last report to him, leaves me in no doubt on that point. But if our military position has greatly improved of late in Galicia, we have not yet begun to attack the German forces. Putting things in their best light, we must still anticipate a very long and severe struggle. … But there is one question which is more urgent and important than all the others: the question of heavy artillery. General Alexeyev is begging me for some every day, and I haven't another gun or round to send him.'
>
> 'But you've had seventy heavy guns just landed at Archangelsk!'
>
> 'I know; but we haven't got the railway wagons. You know what a terrible shortage we're suffering from in that respect. The whole result of the offensive which has begun so brilliantly is in danger of being paralysed by it.'[214]

Paléologue remonstrated that he and the British ambassador had raised this issue repeatedly, and that it was a disgrace that so much *matériel* was languishing in the northern port. Beliaev replied:

> I'm worn out with fighting the railway department; I don't get much more of a hearing than you … but, as you say, it's so serious that we have no right to lose heart. Please speak to Mr. Sazonov [the Russian foreign minister] again; ask him to make representations to the Council of Ministers again.[215]

The coming days would be critical in determining whether Brusilov's triumphs would prove to be of local or strategic significance, and whether Russia's logistic services would be able to provide Southwest Front with the level of support that was critical in sustaining an offensive.

CHAPTER 6

THE GROWING CRISIS

The first days of Brusilov's offensive might not have seen spectacular gains in terms of territory, but there was no doubt in *AOK* and *OHL* that a serious crisis was developing. The Austro-Hungarian Fourth Army was barely able to function as a coherent combat force, and it seemed highly likely that Pflanzer-Baltin's Seventh Army would be forced to retreat in the south to avoid a similar fate. Amongst German circles, this raised once more the fear that the Austro-Hungarian Empire might seek a separate peace. Franz Joseph's empire had entered the war with no clear aims other than revenge upon Serbia following the assassinations of Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie in Sarajevo, and – with the help of Germany – Serbia had been crushed. Even if the Serbian Army remained a force in exile, it was not inconceivable that a peace could be negotiated that would allow for all sides to come away without loss of face. Many in Vienna explicitly feared a decisive German victory, feeling – with good reason – that Berlin would use this to create a hegemony that would leave much of Europe, including the Austro-Hungarian Empire, subordinated to German interests. At the beginning of 1916, Conrad and István Tisza, the Hungarian prime minister, exchanged letters on the matter, with the chief of the Austro-Hungarian General Staff concluding:

> There can be no question of destroying the Russian war machine; England cannot be defeated; peace must be made in not too long a space, or we shall be fatally weakened, if not destroyed.[216]

If the Austro-Hungarian Empire were to pursue a separate peace, it would be impossible for Germany to fight on alone. It was therefore vital for Berlin to ensure that its main ally was provided with whatever support was necessary to allow it to continue in the war.

However, this was not a straightforward task. The fighting at Verdun continued to show little sign of breaking the will of the French to continue the war, though Falkenhayn still believed that his battle of attrition was succeeding. Even as Brusilov's armies began their assault, German troops succeeded in capturing Fort Vaux to the northeast of Verdun, but this high-profile success hid a more fundamental truth about the fighting: the assault that took Fort Vaux moved the German line forward less than 100m over five days.[217] Just as Conrad was reluctant to break off his offensive in Italy, Falkenhayn had devoted so much effort and personal prestige to the Verdun battle that he felt that he had to continue, particularly as it was clear that the British and French were planning a relieving operation on the Somme.

On 8 June, Falkenhayn made a full response to Conrad's appeal for help. German aid would be limited by the exigencies of the Western Front. Whilst the situation in the sector held by Pflanzer-Baltin's Seventh Army was threatening, this was regarded as the lesser problem, as any Austro-Hungarian withdrawal would be into the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains, where defensive operations would become easier. By contrast, the Russian success at Lutsk posed a greater threat, particularly given the parlous state of the Austro-Hungarian Fourth Army. Falkenhayn estimated that it would be possible to provide five German divisions at most, one each from Prince Leopold's army group and Hindenburg's forces further north, and three from the Western Front. These would concentrate near Kovel together with 'some of the sounder Austrian troops' under the personal command of Linsingen, and would conduct a counteroffensive against the advancing Russians. If this was to succeed, the close cooperation of the Austro-Hungarian First Army would be required, and this army would therefore have to be assigned to *Heeresgruppe Linsingen*. The most contentious point, though, was one that had been suggested before by the Germans but had been rejected by Conrad:

> It was further stipulated that in future the German Staff, in addition to the control of the operations, should be ensured full insight into the internal condition of the Austrian troops under their command. Hitherto *AOK* had persistently refused the encroachment of the authority of the German Command on the Austrian sphere of authority which these measures involved. They had maintained that it would undermine their prestige in the eyes of their own army, and that the German Command, who did not understand the peculiar circumstances of the Dual

> Monarchy, could not produce better results from its troops, and would have serious friction with the local authorities and the people. These considerations had been weighed on the German side. There is no doubt that to a certain extent they were justified. The facts that had come to light, however, as to the conduct of our ally in carrying out the Italian 'excursion' excluded henceforward any such consideration. As it appeared, the Galician front was not only weakened by the withdrawal of troops for the benefit of the Italian Front, but even its capacity for resistance had been reduced below any reasonable standard by the withdrawal of its strong complement of artillery, the importance of which for unreliable troops is well known, and further, the loss, partly by exchange and partly by the addition of unreliable reserves, of a considerable part of its most reliable elements. This explained the collapse. There must be no repetition of these occurrences. To prevent it, the Chief of the General Staff [i.e. Falkenhayn] demanded a second guarantee by uniting the front between the Pripet and the Dniester under the command of Field Marshal von Mackensen.[218]

It was a shrewd choice – Mackensen had achieved great success in 1915 commanding forces that included both German and Austro-Hungarian elements, and moreover had been diplomatic in his handling of issues with Germany's ally. In addition, within the German Army he was clearly a member of the Falkenhayn group and therefore his presence in command of all forces south of the Pripet would be a useful counterweight to the anti-Falkenhayn group at *Ober Ost* to the north of the Pripet. At the time, Mackensen was languishing in command of the forces facing the Anglo-French bridgehead at Salonika, and was therefore available for more important duties. Nevertheless, Conrad refused to accept a German commander for the Austro-Hungarian sector of the front, repeating the same arguments about diminution of prestige. Eventually, various elements were agreed. Germany would provide reinforcements to be used in Linsingen's group; Conrad reluctantly acquiesced to moving troops from the Italian front to the east; and the German General Hans von Seeckt, who had been Mackensen's chief of staff throughout 1915, was appointed as chief of staff to the Austro-Hungarian Seventh Army. In addition, Conrad accepted Falkenhayn's insistence that all future operational decisions would be made available to *OHL* before being implemented. However, there would be no overall command south of the Pripet by a German general.

The successes of Brusilov's armies clearly took *OHL* and *AOK* by surprise, but this was matched by the reaction in Russia. Suddenly aware of the possibilities that were opening up in the south, Alexeyev ordered Kuropatkin's Northern

Front to release troops that could be dispatched as reinforcements for Brusilov, and to mount attacks to distract the attention of the Germans and to tie down German troops that might be sent south; one such suggested operation was an amphibious attack in the Gulf of Riga, an operation of a type that had never been attempted by Russian troops and something that Kuropatkin rejected out of hand.[219] But while neither Alexeyev nor any of the other front commanders had expected Brusilov to achieve more than tying down enemy forces, it seems that even Brusilov himself was struggling to catch up with events. On 7 June, when the Austro-Hungarian Fourth Army was pulling back to the Lutsk bridgehead, he urged Kaledin forwards:

> Pursue the enemy energetically, allow him no rest. You must strive to reach the line of the Styr valley as soon as possible. Have your heavy artillery follow, but do not wait for it to attack the retreating enemy, as what you can take as a gift today will require a fight tomorrow.[220]

The following day, as Kaledin's victorious troops reached and in places crossed the Styr, Winogradsky watched the first engagements with the Austro-Hungarian rearguard:

> While we waited for completion of repairs to the bridges that had been burned by the retreating enemies, the scouts crossed the river by any means available and, supported by the fire of a few guns, drove off the enemy cavalry that was still on the left bank with a few losses. From the high ground at Podghaitse, where the Styr curved, we watched from close by (600-700m) the attack of the scouts of the 56th Regiment on the enemy's hussars, who were fighting dismounted. From our exceptional position on the flank of this skirmish, we saw distinctly how with every advance of the *Zhitomirzi* [the home town of the regiment was Zhitomir in Ukraine], accompanied with terrific 'Hurrahs', some of the hussars raised their arms and gave themselves up, while the others retreated prior to giving up in their turn. It was an unusual scene, particularly as the surrounding high ground was soon full of locals who had stayed here and wished to watch the fighting without having to dodge bullets and energetically showed their enthusiasm at the sight of the capture of the Austrians.[221]

Even as the Russian reconnaissance troops were chasing off the *k.u.k.* cavalry with such ease, Kaledin was asking Brusilov how to proceed. Given the almost nonexistent Austro-Hungarian defences beyond the Styr, the answer was astonishing, particularly in light of Brusilov's previous exhortations for an energetic pursuit: instead of pressing on and exploiting his army's remarkable success, Kaledin was to pause and bring up his flanks, particularly to the north. Here, Gillenschmidt's cavalry continued to make no impression, and Brusilov appears to have been preoccupied with his original plan for the mounted force to raid far into the rear of the enemy. His own account of the battle makes no mention of the decision to halt on the Styr.

Several explanations for the reluctance to exploit the victory at Lutsk are possible. Brusilov appears to have been determined to stick to his original concept for the attack, even though he had stressed to his army commanders that it was his intention to apply pressure all along the front line in the expectation that a breakthrough would then occur at one point or other. It would have been in keeping with this to reinforce the successful penetration to Lutsk, and there can have been no doubt in the minds of both Kaledin and Brusilov that a very substantial success had been achieved, but when the moment arrived, there seemed no willingness at either army or front level to exploit it. Whilst Brusilov had not been given resources on the same scale as Evert's West Front, Eighth Army still had sufficient relatively fresh formations to press on energetically. Perhaps part of the answer lies in Brusilov's belief that the primary purpose was to inflict a defeat on the troops in front of his armies. The Austro-Hungarian Fourth Army had undeniably been defeated, and attention could therefore be turned towards defeating those who remained in their original positions. It could of course be argued – and such an argument was forcibly made when the campaign was reviewed in 1920 – that driving on to Kovel, Sokal and in particular Lemberg would have inflicted a fatal defeat on the *k.u.k.* Army, preventing its retreat and almost certainly knocking Austria-Hungary out of the war.[222] However, neither the cautious Kaledin nor his superior Brusilov seemed prepared to improvise and take advantage of events. In fairness, given his lack of reserves, it would have been extremely ambitious for Brusilov to attempt such a strategic victory; but he could at least have made more of the breakthrough at Lutsk.

In many respects, Brusilov's tactics were responsible for some of the inability to exploit success. All four armies were expected to exert pressure, and with no clear forewarning of where a breakthrough might occur, it was impossible to position reserves at the point at which they might be expected to make a contribution. Nor did the railway network lend itself to solving the problem; had there been good lines running from north to south behind the front, reserves might perhaps have been redeployed quickly in reaction to local successes.

There was also the question of what had happened in recent history. Conrad's failed Black-Yellow Offensive of autumn 1915 had resulted in a Russian advance in precisely this area, with Eighth Army – commanded at the time by Brusilov – capturing Lutsk. However, the Germans had then concentrated troops against their northern flank, and Brusilov was ordered by Ivanov, commander of Southwest Front, to fall back to the east. Now, Kaledin sent word to Brusilov that there were signs of German units gathering to the north. Rather than risk leaving the northern flank of his entire front open to a German counterattack, Brusilov decided that he had to engage and destroy this concentration of enemy forces. Such a policy had the added advantage of moving Eighth Army in a direction that would converge with the huge forces massed by Evert's West Front.

Unfortunately for Brusilov, Evert continued to prevaricate. He sent almost daily telegrams to Alexeyev suggesting different points at which he should concentrate his assault, even though the beginning of the assault was meant to be imminent; in particular, he prevaricated endlessly about the weight he should assign to the planned attack at Baranovichi. On 9 June, Alexeyev attempted – rather half-heartedly – to impose his will on the situation in a directive to the front commanders, and appears to have hedged his bets, wishing for Brusilov to continue to drive southwest but also to concentrate in the north:

> The Southwest Front, while continuing to hold down the enemy on the Strypa with limited attacks, will concentrate its forces and efforts on its right flank, with the main task of completing the defeat of the left wing of the Austrians, cutting their army off from roads and rail lines to the west. To this end, the right flank of the front is to push up level with Lutsk and develop further attacks in the general axis of Lutsk – Rava Russka. A strong cavalry unit will move energetically towards Brest-Litovsk, from where it is likely that German troops will appear. In general, the situation requires bold and persistent cavalry operations on the entire front.
>
> West Front is permitted to postpone the start of its main attack until 4 June [Russian calendar, 17 June modern calendar], but is to task its left flank not only to tie down the enemy, but also to ensure that it aids the manoeuvres of Southwest Front. To achieve this, it is earnestly desired that XXXI Corps takes Pinsk and forces are gathered for a deep penetration to Brest-Litovsk. It would seem better that the forces to be used for the secondary assault at Baranovichi should move to XXXI Corps' area, reinforcing it in view of how its success will greatly facilitate the development of the main attack.[223]

However, whilst attention was moving to the north, the troops who were already on or over the Styr struck against the battered Austro-Hungarian Fourth Army. Early on 8 June, Szurmay's troops came under pressure again and immediately the northern wing of XXIV Corps was forced to pull back behind the River Polonka. During the afternoon, Kaledin's troops struck directly west of Lutsk against the remnants of X Corps, immediately forcing them back and away from Szurmay's northern flank. Far from restoring the front as Linsingen insisted, the two Austro-Hungarian corps continued to be driven apart. At the same time, the southern flank of Kaledin's army threatened to cross the relatively thinly defended water obstacles to turn Szurmay's southern flank. If this were to happen, the remnants of XXIV Corps would be forced to pull back far to the west or risk encirclement – and such a withdrawal would leave an even bigger gap in the defences of Linsingen's army group. In an attempt to prevent such a catastrophe, Paul Puhallo's First Army, to the south of the stricken Fourth Army, prepared a counterattack into the southern flank of Kaledin's advance. Puhallo put together perhaps a division's worth of troops under the command of Generalmajor Haas in preparation; it was expected that Linsingen would mount an attack from the north at the same time.

Unfortunately for Puhallo, the Russians had no intention of sitting passively until he was ready to launch his counterattack. In addition to attempting to secure the northern flank of Kaledin's Eighth Army, Brusilov wished to widen the breakthrough to the south, by attacking Puhallo's northern flank. On 10 June, Lieutenant General Ivan Ivanovich Fedotov's XXXII Corps, part of Eleventh Army, struck at the Austro-Hungarian 7th Infantry Division, formerly part of Szurmay's corps but now assigned to First Army. Although the initial attack was beaten off, further waves of infantry moved forward and created a gap between 7th Infantry Division and 46th Rifle Division to its south. Attempts to seal the gap with counterattacks, including the use of Haas' group, failed to make any impact. With no reserves available, Puhallo was aware that he would have no choice but to pull back, but further orders arrived from Teschen requiring him to hold his positions as long as possible – reinforcements were en route and would start to arrive in Lemberg within days.

If the Russians had halted their attacks, Puhallo might have risked keeping his formations in their exposed positions; 46th Rifle Division was at particular risk, with Russian forces to its front and on its northern flank. During the afternoon of 10 June the Russians attacked again at Sapanow further south, and there was now considerable risk that First Army would find itself in a dangerous salient. Regardless of Conrad's wishes, Puhallo gave orders for a withdrawal to the west.

Whilst this allowed him to restore his own line, the gap between his northern flank and the nearest elements of Fourth Army remained considerable, with some 24 miles (40km) covered only by weak cavalry formations. Sakharov's Eleventh Army made little attempt to disrupt or harass the withdrawal; there was sporadic fighting over the next two days, but no determined effort to break through.[224] However, whatever satisfaction Puhallo could take from his withdrawal was diminished by the knowledge that his army would be unable to exert any pressure on the bulge created by Kaledin's breakthrough, and Linsingen's planned offensive would thus lose any support from the south.

In the south, the Russian pressure on the Austro-Hungarian Seventh Army continued. Most of the remaining Austro-Hungarian troops east of the Strypa withdrew before first light on 8 June, and the cautious advance of the Russians after dawn found only abandoned positions. The Russian XVI Corps attacked Buczacz at the seam between the Austro-Hungarian VI and XIII Corps and rapidly made progress; still suffering from a fever, Pflanzer-Baltin shuffled his meagre resources to try to establish a line that would hold. However, the morale of the defenders was undeniably fragile. Even the appearance of Cossack patrols was enough to trigger a panicky retreat by the Austro-Hungarian 15th Infantry Division, and pressure at Buczacz threatened to break the defensive line open. Despite his illness, Pflanzer-Baltin made his way to XIII Corps Headquarters to try to discover exactly what was happening. After speaking to the front line division commanders, he returned to his own headquarters in Kolomea and prepared to order his troops in the south to fall back towards the Carpathians, where they would be able to use the terrain to good effect. However, Conrad intervened from Teschen. Pflanzer-Baltin's army was not to retreat southwest towards the mountains – if it did so, there was less likelihood of it retaining contact with the German South Army, and another gap would open in the front line.

The problem for Pflanzer-Baltin was that his Seventh Army did not have the resources both to retreat west as Conrad wished, whilst preventing the Russians from penetrating into the Carpathians. To make matters worse, it seemed as if a breach in the lines might open up anyway when Russian cavalry attacked and routed the Austro-Hungarian 2nd Cavalry Division west of Buczacz, taking most of its men prisoner. Bitter fighting continued throughout 9 June as Pflanzer-Baltin's corps and division commanders attempted to extract the remnants of their formations and pull them back to a new line. Buczacz fell during the afternoon, and as Russian forces exploited towards the northwest, General Arthur Arz, the commander of VI Corps who together with his men had fought consistently well under Mackensen's command in 1915, had to pull back his southern flank. By doing so, he succeeded in preventing the attacking Russians from beginning to roll up the front towards the north, but this withdrawal took his men further from the stricken XIII Corps, still reeling back towards the west.[225] Arz's corps was part of Seventh Army, but was effectively out of contact with Pflanzer-Baltin and functioning as the most southern formation of the German South Army, with strict orders to try to retain contact with XIII Corps to the south. Eventually, the battered and demoralised troops of XIII Corps halted on 10 June along the River Koropiec, 18 miles (30km) west of the Strypa valley. Contact was maintained, albeit tenuously, but there was little doubt that the line was too fragile to withstand further attacks.

On 9 June, Kaledin's forces west of Lutsk continued to herd the helpless remnants of the Austro-Hungarian X Corps westwards. Szurmay had managed to stabilise his lines to the south, but only at the cost of abandoning any attempt to retain contact with his northern neighbour; a growing gap yawned between XXIV and X Corps. However, the critical events of 9 and 10 June occurred at the southern end of Brusilov's Southwest Front. Here, troops from Lechitsky's Ninth Army shelled the lines of *Gruppe Benigni* between Okna and the Dniester late on 9 June, a sector that until now had been comparatively quiet. Throughout the night, the two sides exchanged artillery fire on the heights of Czarny Potok, and early on 10 June heavy Russian artillery fire struck at the Austro-Hungarian trenches between Czarny Potok and Okna. At 10 a.m., Russian infantry attacked Okna but were beaten off by defensive artillery fire; at the same time, bitter hand-to-hand fighting erupted around Czarny Potok as the Russians attempted to secure the vital high ground. Despite considerable losses, Benigni's troops seemed to be holding off the assault, with attacks followed by counterattacks, but in keeping with Brusilov's new doctrine, Lechitsky intended to apply pressure all along the front, confident that the weakened Austro-Hungarian lines would collapse somewhere, and his troops now delivered a series of blows which, in combination, decided the battle.

One hour after the infantry fighting at Okna and Czarny Potok began, a segment of front line further to the northwest, held by Hungarian cavalry, came under sudden attack. Before the defenders could react, Russian infantry seized the village of Doroschoutz and drove the cavalry off in disorder before turning south and threatening the rear of the Austro-Hungarian positions at Okna. By mid-afternoon, another Russian assault forced the lines south of Czarny Potok, and the high ground finally passed into Russian hands. Heavily engaged, with no reserves available to restore the situation, the Austro-Hungarian forces fell back in disarray.

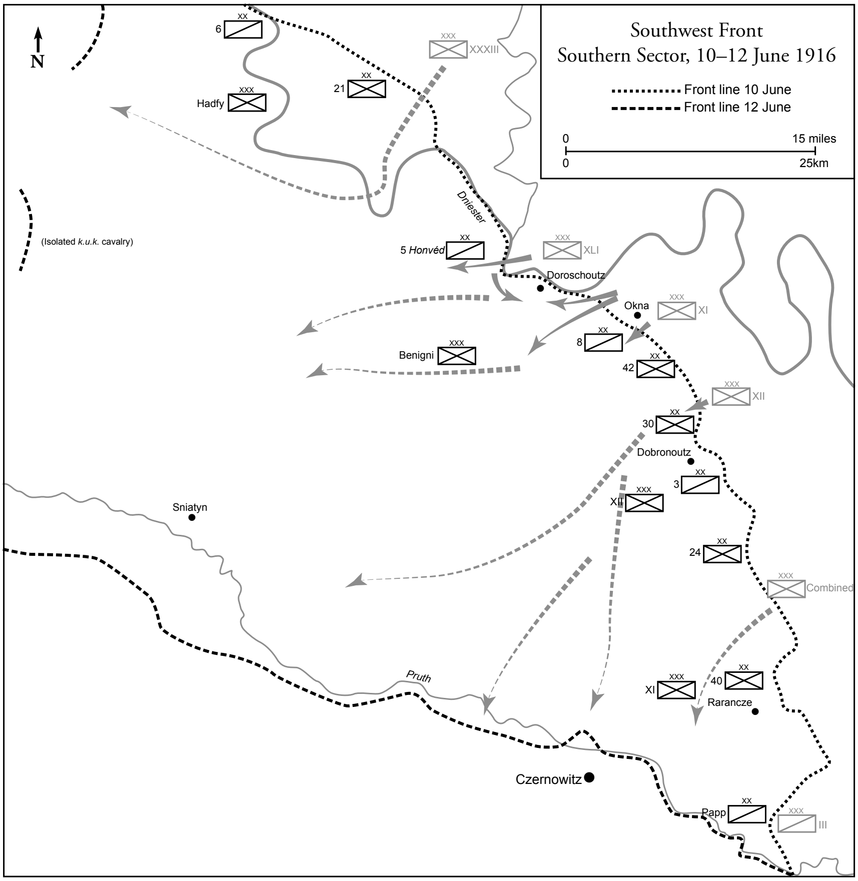
It was a graphic demonstration of Brusilov's theories. Pressure across a broad front forced the defenders to commit their reserves and left no sectors that could release troops to aid others. Nor was it possible for sectors that succeeded in holding their positions to crush attacking infantry with flanking fire. The innovative use of artillery increased the chances of success at every point, and once the hard-pressed defensive line cracked, it was impossible for the *k.u.k.* Army to restore the situation. Pflanzer-Baltin ordered Benigni to try to establish a new defensive line, but knew that without reinforcements, the position was hopeless. He had already made preparations for a retreat towards the southwest, with rear area units moved in anticipation, and had accepted that the consequence might be that a gap would open up between his army and Bothmer's South Army; however, Pflanzer-Baltin had come up with an imaginative way of restoring the situation, as his chief of staff later wrote:

> Many years after the war, I learned to my surprise that Pflanzer-Baltin had devised a plan on 8 June to pull back the entire army behind the Pruth and from there to mount an offensive. For my comrades who at that time were part of the command and for me, this concept was absurd. Apparently, Pflanzer-Baltin's plan was blocked by *AOK* in Teschen, and the instructions of *AOK* rested upon the leadership of Seventh Army like a lead weight. I note that the retreat of Seventh Army took place in complete accordance with the guiding principle of *AOK*, in order to prevent isolation from the neighbouring German South Army. Pflanzer-Baltin absolutely did not share his plan with me about such an adventurous plan, to withdraw the shattered Seventh Army behind the Pruth and therefore about 100km [60 miles] from the German South Army, it was never worked through in theory, and in no sense did it have any influence on the leadership and on the events that occurred with Seventh Army.[226]

Zeynek's clear view that the matter was not discussed by Seventh Army Headquarters is contradicted by other sources, but Conrad remained adamant that Seventh Army should fall back to the west and retain contact with the German South Army at all costs.[227] Conrad's policy might make sense from distant Teschen, but despite Zeynek's severe reservations about the proposed separation of Seventh Army from the rest of the front, Pflanzer-Baltin could see that with his forces already outflanked to the north, a retreat to the west would expose them to further damage, while his preferred option would at least take them in a direction of safety. In any event, as Zeynek remarked, the instructions from *AOK* left no room for discretion.

Orders were sent out to the retreating corps of Seventh Army to pull back to the west. The consequence was that a defeat rapidly turned into a rout. Logistic and other rear area columns that had been heading for the Carpathian foothills attempted to head west, choking the roads needed by the fighting troops. The Russians had already outpaced them and were operating some distance to their west, and as all sense of order broke down, Benigni ordered military police detachments to block roads leading south in an attempt to force the leaderless masses to fall back to the west in compliance with his orders. Fortunately for Benigni, the Russians were slow to react to their success. By the time Russian troops began to push west in strength to threaten Benigni's northern flank, many of his formations had pulled back; this was surely the moment for the numerous Russian cavalry formations at least to make a decisive contribution, yet they were conspicuous by their absence other than in isolated raids and reconnaissance probes. Behind a fragile line composed of the few remaining coherent infantry regiments available, Benigni's staff struggled to restore order, aided by officers from Seventh Army Headquarters. As afternoon turned to evening on 10 June, a large formation of Cossacks appeared, threatening to scatter the troops who were slowly being pulled into shape, but a single company of sappers took up defensive positions and fought them off – a further demonstration that despite the persistent belief that cavalry was the best force to exploit a breakthrough, it could be held off by even modest defenders if they showed sufficient determination.[228] The day's losses had been heavy, but they stopped short of becoming disastrous.

Pflanzer-Baltin's problems weren't over. To the south of Benigni's group was Korda's XI Corps, still holding the positions it had defended so successfully during the winter; it only received its orders to retreat on the evening of 10 June. With little interference from the Russians, Korda's formations pulled back behind the line of the River Pruth. Their most pressing concern was that their line of withdrawal diverged from that of *Gruppe Benigni*, making it increasingly difficult to retain contact. One of Korda's formations – 24th Infantry Division – was assigned the task of maintaining the link, but when it came under attack from Cossacks on 11 June it rapidly disintegrated. Many men were taken prisoner, others fled to the south bank of the Pruth. This lamentable performance puts into stark contrast the determined defence mounted by the sapper company the previous day. Further cavalry assaults on Benigni's fragile line also resulted in panic and disorder, and it was only with great difficulty that the Russian horsemen were beaten off. Despite the growing strain on his line, Pflanzer-Baltin had no choice but to authorise a further retreat to the west. As he advised Teschen during the evening:


Southwest Front
Southern Sector, 10–12 June 1916
Front line 10 June
Front line 12 June
0 15 miles
0 25km
N
6
XXXIII
Hadfy
21
Dniester
(Isolated k.u.k. cavalry)
5 Honvéd
XLI
Doroschoutz
Okna
XI
8
Benigni
42
XII
30
Dobronoutz
3
XII
Sniatyn
24
Combined
Pruth
XI
40
Rarancze
Czernowitz
Papp
III

> Further resistance by *Gruppe Benigni* against any enemy attack is impossible until these troops are able to get some rest … the possibility of stopping an attack is completely nonexistent. Such a decision [to make a stand] would lead to the complete disintegration of *Gruppe Benigni*.[229]

During the night, the exhausted troops pulled back further to a new defensive position. The only factor that saved them was that the Russians were struggling to keep up. As was consistently the case in the First World War, sustaining an advance proved to be almost impossible, and the diverging lines of retreat of Pflanzer-Baltin's troops – XI Corps to the south across the Pruth, the rest to the west – made it difficult for Lechitsky to concentrate his forces against one or other. Nevertheless, when he visited *Gruppe Benigni*, Pflanzer-Baltin was left in no doubt that the ability of his forces to resist remained almost nonexistent. Divisions had been reduced to fewer than 3,000 men and many guns had been lost, while those that had escaped had no ammunition available. The Russians estimated that they had taken over 38,000 prisoners and captured forty-nine guns; after adding in those who were killed or wounded, it is clear that the Austro-Hungarian Seventh Army was a shadow of its former self.[230]

On 12 June, Pflanzer-Baltin finally learned officially that Seeckt was his new chief of staff; it seems that he had been warned of the coming appointment a couple of days earlier. The arrangements were described in a telegram from Archduke Frederick to Seventh Army Headquarters:

> In view of additional German reinforcements for Seventh Army, [the Germans] will have greater influence on operational command, which is why Generalleutnant von Seeckt is appointed senior chief of staff, and Oberst Zeynek is to remain in his post as chief of staff … In view of the pressing seriousness of the situation, I have complete confidence that both [Pflanzer-Baltin and Zeynek] will cooperate and I anticipate their fruitful cooperation with Generalleutnant von Seeckt.[231]

Zeynek himself rejected such an arrangement as unworkable and informed Pflanzer-Baltin that he would not be able to stay in post when Seeckt arrived. Pflanzer-Baltin agreed with Zeynek, and wrote in his diary about growing German influence:

> For sure, there was a need for consolidated command, but the Germans should not have used this so brusquely against our way of thinking.[232]

Regardless of the misgivings at Seventh Army Headquarters about what they regarded as overbearing German interference, Seeckt showed a deft touch when he took up his new post, and Zeynek made an emotional departure:

> The manner in which he took over matters made a very good first impression upon me: he also gave me credit for not wanting to stay in my post. Pflanzer-Baltin was downcast, and there was unrest amongst the staff. On 16 June I shared lunch with them, and then stood up and said farewell to Generalleutnant Seeckt, who was also there. As I left, all the officers stood, it was deathly silent, all eyes on me, and I could barely hold back my tears. I had had wonderful colleagues in the general staff, engineers and artillery staff.

> Thus ended what was for me the most important part of my operational duty in the world war. The most striking feeling was that now the monarchy was not just defending itself against external enemies, but at the same time had to fight against the desire for hegemony by the Prussians, who also wished to use the world war to crush Austria-Hungary.[233]

In addition to the new chief of staff, two infantry divisions – the German 105th Infantry Division and the Austro-Hungarian 48th Infantry Division – were on their way to the stricken Seventh Army, and a suggestion was made about whether Pflanzer-Baltin should mount a counterattack prior to their arrival. His summary was blunt and straightforward:

> *Gruppe Benigni* and *Gruppe Hadfy* [the corps that had originally been on Benigni's northern flank] have between them a combat strength of about 28,000 rifles. Should the Russians move west as I expect with three corps (XXXIII, XLI and XII), this is not sufficient to halt such an attack. Therefore these two groups must avoid further blows until the expected reinforcements arrive.[234]

Far from mounting a counterattack, Pflanzer-Baltin felt that the best option was to fall back further, abandoning Kolomea and concentrating about 18 miles (30km) to the west where, once the reinforcements arrived, it would be possible to gather sufficient strength to stop the Russians.

As Pflanzer-Baltin's army streamed back towards the west in utter disarray, Bothmer grew increasingly alarmed about the threat faced by his South Army. He was aware of the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Fourth Army 60 miles (100km) to his north, and now saw Russian forces pressing forward immediately to the south of his army. There was a very real danger that the two successful Russian assault groups would turn towards each other; if this were to happen, and if the two Austro-Hungarian armies north of Bothmer's forces proved to be as brittle as Fourth and Seventh Armies, South Army might find itself facing disaster. As a first step to address this, Bothmer requested that Arz's VI Corps, the only part of the Austro-Hungarian Seventh Army to escape intact and currently operating on the southern flank of South Army, should be assigned to his command. As already mentioned, Arz and his troops had spent much of 1915 operating as part of German-led forces during Mackensen's offensive, and had made a favourable impression upon the Germans, and to Bothmer's relief, VI Corps came under his command on 10 June, together with instructions to use his forces to counterattack towards the south against the Russians.

The transfer was very timely. Shcherbachev's Seventh Army renewed its attacks on the Austro-Hungarian XIII Corps, immediately south of VI Corps, early on 10 June. Once again, the presence of Russian armoured cars caused consternation and panic amongst the defenders. Fighting spread to VI Corps' sector as the day progressed, and during the afternoon it became clear that it would not be possible to continue defending the line of the Strypa valley. A gap opened in VI Corps' sector, and Arz committed his limited reserves in an attempt to restore the situation. Bothmer had very few reserves available at army level and dispatched a few companies of infantry to help Arz, while assembling a larger group for the counterattack that he had been ordered to make. However, it was a sign of how rapidly the Russians had modernised their approach to warfare that they detected the concentration of German forces by aerial reconnaissance and reported this immediately to Shcherbachev's headquarters. The response was immediate: the Russian Army would turn its attention to the north in order to address any threat from Bothmer. The main effort on 11 June would be made by XVI Corps against Arz's troops, while XXII Corps to its north pushed across the Strypa. Further south, the troops who had driven back the Austro-Hungarian XIII Corps were ordered to dig in and take up defensive positions.[235]

Bothmer's counterattack was to begin early on 11 June with forces centred on much of the German 48th Reserve Infantry Division under the command of Lieutenant General Hermann von Oppeln-Bronikowski, whose son would lead German armoured forces against the Russians in a future war. The Austro-Hungarian 12th Infantry Division, part of Arz's corps, would also join the attack, but Shcherbachev struck first. After a powerful artillery bombardment, the Russian XVI Corps drove into Arz's positions, making steady progress. At midday, Oppeln-Bronikowski launched his counterattack; it was now the turn of Sergei Sergeyevich Savich's XVI Corps to come under pressure. Most of the gains made earlier in the day, and some from the day before, were lost. Savich had to commit all his reserves to hold his battle line together. The following day, Alexander Fridrikovoch Brinken's XXII Corps attempted to drive back Bothmer's southern flank; the two sides exchanged artillery fire throughout 12 June, but there were few significant infantry attacks and the front line remained unchanged.

There were further changes in command arrangements. The Austro-Hungarian XIII Corps was also assigned to Bothmer's South Army, and Pflanzer-Baltin's plan to concentrate his forces west of Kolomea was rejected by Conrad at *AOK*. Instead, he was to take up defensive positions further east. The justification for this was that the reinforcements that were available would be inadequate for a counterattack to regain lost territory if the retreat was as great as Pflanzer-Baltin proposed; in addition, the abandonment of so much territory might give the Russians the opportunity to entrench themselves in the Carpathian foothills, from where it would prove difficult and costly to dislodge them. However, the counter-argument was that by holding a line further east, Seventh Army might suffer further defeats and losses, making such considerations redundant. For the moment at least, *AOK* prevailed and Pflanzer-Baltin had to order his stricken divisions to defend their positions.

Lechitsky now turned his attention to the south; as he drove Pflanzer-Baltin's shattered forces west, he was aware that his own southern flank was increasingly stretched. He therefore decided to divert a substantial part of his forces – XII and XI Corps, the Combined Corps, and a division of Cossacks – to strike south and to capture Czernowitz. Other forces – III Cavalry Corps and a further Cossack division – would attempt to seize Kolomea. This would leave only XXXIII and XLI Corps continuing the pursuit towards the west; further advances in that direction would be better left until the southern flank was secure.[236] Such a policy was perhaps prudent, but the diversion of forces was substantial. A resumption of the advance towards the west would have to wait for the operations against Czernowitz and Kolomea to be completed. Everything would hinge on whether the southern flank of Lechitsky's army could be secured quickly.

The Austro-Hungarian defences along the line of the Pruth to the west of Czernowitz came under attack on 12 June. Alerted by aerial reconnaissance, Pflanzer-Baltin ordered Korda to position his reserves behind his northwest flank to beat off the Russians. The following day, there was heavy fighting around Czernowitz itself, while Austro-Hungarian reconnaissance flights continued to report substantial Russian infantry forces massing along the Pruth. Nevertheless, the defenders were on high ground on the south bank, and Korda was confident that they would be able to hold their positions. If the Russians were attacking the Pruth in strength and could be halted, the pressure on Siegmund Benigni and Feldmarschallleutnant Emmerich Hadfy might be reduced to a tolerable level, and the line might be held until reinforcements could arrive.

Lechitsky's troops had no intention of being halted, at least in pressing south. Late on 14 June, they secured crossings over the Pruth about 6 miles (10km) northwest of Czernowicz, and dawn saw further Russian forces assembling north of the river. At the same time, Pflanzer-Baltin was given a decoded Russian radio message that identified the substantial forces massing against Korda as amounting to three corps, while Benigni and Hadfy were faced by two corps and considerable cavalry formations. The westward drive of the Russian advance had clearly slackened, partly due to the diversion of effort to the south and partly due to the sheer length of Russian supply lines; in any event, the pause gave the broken and disorganised Austro-Hungarian units some precious breathing space. Whether this would be sufficient when the Russians advanced again was open to question.

Falkenhayn and Conrad continued to debate how best to rescue the situation. Two divisions – the German 105th Infantry Division and the Austro-Hungarian 48th Infantry Division – had been intended as reinforcements for Benigni and Hadfy, but Falkenhayn now suggested that they be assigned to Bothmer's southern flank, from where they could join a counterattack towards the south and thus into the northern flank of the Russian advance. Conrad was less convinced that the troops would be sufficient to allow for a counterattack that would be powerful enough to achieve Falkenhayn's aims, and remained concerned about the poor state of Seventh Army; but Falkenhayn's will prevailed, and Conrad had to inform Pflanzer-Baltin that the reinforcements on which the commander of Seventh Army had placed his hopes would not be forthcoming. The depleted divisions would have to continue to hold back the Russians unaided.

Not long after taking up his post at Seventh Army, Hans von Seeckt sent a message to Conrad:

> If the allocation of the two divisions … is no longer possible, it is my earnest conviction that at least heavy artillery must be made available urgently. The diminishing strength to resist of the infantry can only be compensated for by improving the artillery support. The feeling of facing greatly superior artillery is very widespread and must have a detrimental effect on the troops … Given the task assigned to it, the position of Seventh Army is difficult. It is doubtful that it still has the internal integrity to withstand a strong, well-prepared, comprehensive attack. I fear that while it tries to fulfil its task of covering the area between the Pruth and Dniester with its main forces [Benigni and Hadfy] and securing Bukovina with the other group [Korda], the army will be broken in two.[237]

Despite the hopes of Archduke Frederick, relations between Seeckt and his Austrian commander were not comfortable. Pflanzer-Baltin had a habit of visiting his subordinate formations, preferring to judge for himself rather than rely on reports; one staff officer wrote to Zeynek, now on leave in Prague, that this irritated Seeckt, and concluded that this was because direct communication between Pflanzer-Baltin and his corps commanders left the German chief of staff with no opportunity to exert any influence. Partly due their long time together at Seventh Army Headquarters, Zeynek and Pflanzer-Baltin had enjoyed a relaxed relationship, with the chief of staff frequently offering his opinion and advice without being asked; by contrast, Seeckt rarely gave his opinion unless asked.[238]

As the moment grew closer for West Front to make what was intended to be the main Russian attack of the summer, Evert's hesitations continued. The resources that had been made available were substantially greater than those allocated to either Kuropatkin's Northern Front or Brusilov's Southwest Front; Evert had fifty-eight infantry divisions at his disposal, including the Guards Army, whereas Kuropatkin and Brusilov had only thirty-eight divisions each. After the complaints that the March fighting had been hindered by a shortage of heavy artillery, special attention had been given to this, with the result that Ragosa's Fourth Army deployed 138 heavy guns on a front of only a little over 5 miles (9km).[239] Ammunition, too, was available in quantities unimagined before the war. Nevertheless, Evert remained doubtful of success. He sent a message to Alexeyev that despite concentrating his forces for an attack towards Vilna, he was concerned that the Germans were aware of his intentions and had taken additional defensive measures. As a result, the troops of West Front would face the difficult task of making frontal assaults on heavily fortified positions. On 15 June – just two days before he was meant to launch his attack – he suggested that he should abandon the planned attack near Vilna, and instead should shift the centre of gravity for West Front to the south, with attacks in the Baranovichi and Pinsk areas. This would allow him to cooperate more closely with Brusilov, and once his troops had gained sufficient ground, they would be able to turn north to threaten Vilna from the south, thus avoiding the difficult task of smashing through the German defences.[240]

Brusilov's Southwest Front was at first unaware of Evert's further request for a delay. Much as Mackensen had been forced to pause to redeploy his forces after each successful attack the previous year, Kaledin's Eighth Army had little choice but to wait for guns and supplies to be brought forward, particularly on the northern flank where the main effort was now to be made. Brusilov continued to wait impatiently for news of an attack by West Front, fearing that if there were further delays, Linsingen would be able to strike at Kaledin's forces west of Lutsk and would still have time to turn north to help defeat West Front's attack. A day after Evert was meant to have commenced his operations, Brusilov received bad news that confirmed his fears:

> On 5 June [Russian calendar, 18 June modern calendar], [Alexeyev] summoned me to the telegraph machine to inform me of new information: following reconnaissance, Evert had concluded that the enemy had concentrated against his

> main forces and had deployed numerous heavy guns; Evert believed that the planned attack could not succeed, and would attack if ordered but with the certainty of failure; he requested permission to transfer the main point of effort to Baranovichi where he thought the attack could be a success. Taking all this into account, the tsar allowed Evert to refrain from attacking and to organise a new attack group at Baranovichi. To this I replied that I had feared this, that I would be left without the support of my neighbours and thus my success would be limited to only a tactical victory and a limited advance, which would have no impact on the outcome of the war. Inevitably, the enemy would redeploy troops from all sides and throw them against me, and ultimately I would be forced to halt. I thought that even if Evert and Kuropatkin could not succeed with their attacks, the very fact of their occurrence would to some extent bind enemy troops to their fronts for some considerable time and prevent reserves from their fronts being sent against my own troops.
>
> Creating a new strike force at Baranovichi could not lead to any favourable outcome, and it would take at least six weeks to prepare for a successful attack against a fortified zone, during which time I would suffer unnecessary losses and would not be able to succeed. I requested that my urgent request for Evert to be ordered to attack now at the long-prepared point should be passed to the tsar. Evert replied, 'The tsar's decisions cannot be changed,' and added that Evert had been given a deadline to attack the enemy at Baranovichi no later than 20 June [3 July].
>
> … I was well aware that the tsar had nothing to do with this, as in military matters he could be considered an infant, and that the entire issue was that although Alexeyev clearly understood the situation and the criminal behaviour of Evert and Kuropatkin, having been their subordinate during the Russo-Japanese War, he made every effort to excuse their inaction and reluctantly agreed with their views.[241]

The only consolation Brusilov received was the promise of two additional infantry corps as reinforcements. Brusilov made no attempt to hide his disappointment at the failure of other fronts to support him, writing to Alexeyev the same day:

> The troops do not understand – and it is difficult to explain to them – why the other fronts remain quiet.[242]

In order to carry out the new plan, Ragosa's Fourth Army would be pulled out of its positions and moved behind the Russian Tenth Army so that it could concentrate immediately north of Baranovichi, a move of 108 miles (180km).

Ragosa later told Brusilov that he was unhappy with the course of events, but had no choice:

> Later … General Ragosa, my former subordinate in peacetime and wartime, told me that when he was assigned the task of attacking the fortified positions at Maladzechna [for the drive towards Vilna], his preparations were excellent and he was firmly convinced that with the resources that were made available to him, he could succeed, but both he and his troops were utterly demoralised when the long-planned attack, which was ideal for them, was suddenly abandoned. He went to speak to Evert, who said at first that it was the will of the tsar. He [Ragosa] replied that he did not wish to be held responsible if this new plan failed for some reason or other and requested permission to file a memorandum stating clearly that there was no reason for the abandonment of the attack, and asked Evert to present the memorandum to the supreme commander. Initially, Evert agreed to this request and left Ragosa with his chief of staff in his office to prepare the note, but when Ragosa had written it and handed it to Evert, the front commander told him that he would not pass the note on to anyone, and only then admitted that the initiative to cancel the selected site of Maladzechna came from him personally and that he asked permission from *Stavka* to move the assault to a different point.[243]

Ragosa's discussion with Brusilov occurred long after the event, and there is no evidence to support his version of events. However, assuming for the moment that it is an accurate account, his confidence in his preparations may have been misplaced, given his poor performance in the Naroch battle in March. Similarly, just as Brusilov regarded Alexeyev's acquiescence to Evert and Kuropatkin as being partly due to his previous role as their subordinate, the same criticism could be made of Ragosa – he might have told Brusilov what his former commander wished to hear. Ragosa went on to tell Brusilov that he believed that Evert had become afraid of failure, particularly given Brusilov's successes, and preferred inaction to possibly being held responsible for defeat.

The artillery emplacements that had been prepared with such effort throughout the summer, the ammunition and supply dumps, all had to be moved on Russia's inadequate railways. Knox summarised the problems of the Russian rail system accurately:

> Firstly the country suffered from Peter the Great's choice of Petrograd as his capital. The supply of Petrograd, at the furthest possible point in the empire, from the food-producing areas was becoming increasingly difficult, as the population

was swollen by over half a million refugees from the occupied territories and by the additional workmen in the enlarged munitions factories. A far-seeing administration would have in the summer used the inland waterways to lay up stores of provisions for the winter months. Some attempt was made to do this, but the scheme, to be successful, required the intelligent co-operation of two ministries – that of Ways and Communications and that of Agriculture – and so was foredoomed to failure.

Secondly, the transport of coal proved as difficult as had been foreseen before the war. In peacetime, Poland and much of western Russia were supplied from the Dombrova mines in southwest Poland. These had been in enemy occupation since the first days of the war. Northern and central Russia were supplied by British or German coal imported through the Baltic; southeast Russia was fed from the Donets coalmines. The English coal that now came through Archangelsk was, of course, only a small part of the amount necessary to supply the munitions factories of the north, and the necessary balance had to be transported 2,000 to 3,000 miles [3,200–4,800km] by rail from the Donets basin or from Siberia.

Thirdly, the supply of the army, with its millions of men and horses eating far more than they were accustomed to consume in peace, caused a far more intense traffic west of the general line Petrograd–Moscow–Kiev than had been known before the war. Again, in peacetime the principal ports of entry had been Petrograd, Riga and Odessa – all within a short distance of the most densely populated region. Now all these ports were closed and overseas supplies could only be obtained from Archangelsk in the far north, or from Vladivostok in the far east, and the long journeys to and fro locked up rolling stock.

Lastly, Finland, which in peacetime received most of its foodstuffs from Germany, had now to be fed from southern Russia and from Siberia.

The administration of the railways of the empire was at this time divided into two directorates. The Western Rayon, comprising all the lines west of Petrograd–Kiev–Odessa, was under a general at *Stavka*, while the Eastern Rayon, including all the other lines, was controlled by the Minister of Ways and Communications in Petrograd.

… Most of the engines were old, some dating from 1860, and they were mostly of small power. The proportion constantly laid up for repair had increased from 15.8 per cent in 1914 to 17.3 per cent.

The directorates did not work tactfully together … General Ronjin, the director of the Western Rayon, had 20,000 wagons that rightfully belonged to the Eastern Rayon. The next day General Ronjin said that, on the contrary, the Minister [in charge of the Eastern Rayon] had 8,000 wagons of his![244]

When Knox attempted to raise the problems of the railways with the tsar, he was surprised to learn that Nicholas knew nothing of the difficulties that were restricting Russia's efforts to move men and supplies on the scale required, particularly as this was a matter that had been discussed in military circles since the start of the war.

In some respects, the decision for the change in emphasis by West Front was reasonable; the new attack would be against the one point of the Eastern Front north of the Pripet Marshes that was held by Austro-Hungarian forces rather than German troops. However, this was known at the time that the original Vilna offensive was planned. The decisive factor was Brusilov's unexpected success. The original strategic vision was for convergent attacks by Northern and West Front, with Southwest Front doing little more than tying down troops to prevent their use elsewhere. Now, the intention was to make convergent attacks with West and Southwest Fronts. As was the case with Brusilov's plans, Ragosa distributed his artillery evenly between his corps to allow for pressure to be exerted all along the front – wherever a breakthrough was achieved, he would then reinforce it.

Such changes in emphasis, involving West Front moving its point of main effort over 100 miles (160km), reflect the lack of strategic coherence in the original plans of *Stavka*. The plans for the summer offensives by all three fronts did not show any overall vision of how they could support each other; there was no consideration of how to proceed if one or more fronts should fail to achieve their objectives. From the beginning of the war, *Stavka* had repeatedly failed to impose its will on Russia's front commanders, and its role amounted to little more than attempting to coordinate their efforts. Until the summer of 1915, this was blamed upon Grand Duke Nikolai and his ineffectual chief of staff, Nikolai Yanushkevich. Replacing the grand duke with his nephew the tsar, who had no significant military experience, did nothing to improve command and control, and whilst Alexeyev was undoubtedly capable of excellent staff work, routinely labouring for over fifteen hours a day, he lacked the strategic vision to devise an overall strategy that would put Russia's numerical resource to best use. All of his predecessors in the role of chief of the general staff had been selected by the former war minister, Vladimir Sukhomlinov, to ensure that they did not become significant threats to his own power base, and none of them had developed the administrative support staff that allowed the likes of Falkenhayn in Germany or Conrad in Austria-Hungary to concentrate on strategic planning. The tsar consulted Alexeyev on every occasion and simply followed his advice; almost overwhelmed with the minutiae of his post, Alexeyev had little time or energy to look in detail at the plans of the front commanders and to come up with a clear strategic vision of his own. However, in fairness to Alexeyev, Brusilov's strategy of ordering all his armies to mount attacks with the intention of supporting and exploiting whichever was successful did nothing to simplify Alexeyev's task of coordinating matters.

During this period, a battle was fought further to the north that would have major political consequences. At the start of Brusilov's offensive, the sector of the front to the north of the Austro-Hungarian Fourth Army was held by the Army of the Bug, under the direct command of Linsingen, and one of the formations of this army was the Polish Legion, deployed near the town of Kostiuchnówka. The legion had originally been recruited under the aegis of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in an attempt to create instability amongst the Polish parts of the tsar's empire, and was led by Józef Piłsudski, the future leader of independent Poland. Since 1906, he had been funded by Vienna to promote anti-Russian unrest, and had added to his resources by operations such as a raid on a Russian train that was carrying tax revenues back to Russia.[245] When war broke out, Piłsudski was quick to recognise that an important preliminary step in Poland's path to independence was the defeat of tsarist Russia, a state that he rightly regarded as the most repressive in Europe, and consequently the volunteers who had been working alongside Piłsudski in the years before the war were organised into the 1st Brigade of the Polish Legion to fight alongside Austro-Hungarian troops. However, Piłsudski was no supporter of the Central Powers; he regarded them too as occupiers of Poland, and once Russia had been driven out of Polish territory, he believed that he and his fellow Poles would have to persuade the Germans and Austro-Hungarians to leave too; it remained to be seen whether this would involve fighting, but he held secret meetings with representatives of France and Britain to make clear to the western members of the Entente that Polish troops would never fight against them, only against Russia.

The Polish Legion had already fought with some distinction against the Russians, particularly in the first winter of the war when it played a significant part in the battle that put an end to the Russian threat to Krakow. Further brigades had been added to the original force, and by the summer of 1916, Piłsudski commanded about the equivalent of half an infantry division, with three infantry brigades and artillery and cavalry support. The men were dug in to fortified positions with Hungarian formations on either flank, and the position came under attack from the Russian XLVI Corps on 6 June as part of Kaledin's general advance. As was the case elsewhere, the Russian infantry attack was preceded by careful artillery preparation, but was repulsed in heavy fighting.

A second Russian attack succeeded in penetrating the Polish positions, but a surprise counterattack late on 8 June left the two sides back where they had started. Eventually, as the Central Powers pulled back from their original positions, the Polish Legion was the last formation to withdraw. To a large extent, this was through oversight, with orders failing to reach them in time, but the legend grew that the Poles had bravely covered the withdrawal of other forces. They had suffered substantial losses – about a third of their 7,000 men – but had succeeded in holding their line. Compared to the fighting elsewhere, the Battle of Kostiuchnówka, as it became known in Polish circles, was a relatively minor action. Although the Poles made considerable capital from their claim that the successful withdrawal of German troops was only possible due to their determination to hold their positions to the very last moment, the reality is that the Russians made little attempt to force the issue after the initial assaults. Nevertheless, the engagement raised the profile of the Polish Legion – already highly regarded by the Central Powers – still further. This would ultimately lead to greater pressure for greater independence to be granted to the Poles in exchange for their support in fighting the Russians.[246]

To date, Brusilov's armies had enjoyed astonishing success: total Austro-Hungarian losses amounted to nearly 205,000 men, of whom 150,000 had been taken prisoner.[247] Given the appalling treatment of prisoners in a future war by both sides, it is remarkable that there are few accounts of mistreatment – somehow, food and shelter was found for all of those who surrendered, though it was unavoidable that – given the numbers involved – there were problems to be overcome. Inevitably, given the scale of the disaster, Vienna urgently sought answers and Feldmarschallleutnant Ferdinand Ritter von Marterer was sent from the war ministry to Teschen to investigate. Conrad was not minded to accept any personal criticism; he informed Marterer that the collapse of Fourth and Seventh Armies had taken him completely by surprise. He made no mention of the transfer of so many experienced troops and almost all the heavy artillery from these armies to the Italian front, and concluded the interview by advising Marterer that he should inform Vienna that they should not expect Russia to be defeated purely by military means. For Conrad, this was a considerable departure from his pre-war doctrine; he had repeatedly written that it was vital for a nation to wage war to the utmost end of its strength in order to break the will of the enemy to continue, and he now seemed to be prepared to accept something far short of this. In truth, he was beginning to weary of the war. The *k.u.k.* Army in its current form was largely of his creation, and given its repeated failures, even a man with limited insight would have grown disheartened. Personal factors, too, played a part in Conrad's mindset. His son Herbert had been killed in 1914 near Rava Russka in Galicia, and this loss had affected him deeply, though he continued to throw the sons of other families into pointless battles regardless of the terrible casualties that the army suffered. One of Conrad's personal motivations for war had been the hope that by leading the *k.u.k.* Army to great victories, his personal prestige would be sufficient for him to overcome the stigma of marrying his mistress, the divorcee Gina von Reininghaus. He had married her in 1915, perhaps after concluding that his dreams of being hailed as the all-conquering hero would never be fulfilled and, to the disapproval of many in the Austro-Hungarian establishment, lived with her in Teschen during his time as chief of the general staff. Many felt that this set a bad example, especially with so many men serving in the army far from home. Some senior officers, including close allies of Conrad, recalled that when he had written about military training before the war, Conrad had stressed the importance of officers living together in order to build camaraderie, consciously attempting to emulate the British officers' mess system. They now resented the fact that Conrad sometimes absented himself from headquarters to spend time with his wife.[248] Perhaps a measure of how distracted he was from his work is the fact that although the Russians were over 300 miles (480km) from *AOK*, he still advised Gina to leave just in case; she travelled briefly to Vienna before returning to Conrad's side.[249]

Despite his reluctance to step forward and accept responsibility, the general view was that Conrad was largely to blame for the disaster. Archduke Frederick had questioned whether it was wise to transfer so many men and guns from the Eastern Front for the Italian *Strafexpedition*, and only four days before Brusilov's offensive opened there was a further discussion between the two men, in which Conrad assured the commander-in-chief of the army that all would be well.[250] However, Marterer's report merely presented Conrad's views to the authorities in Vienna, whose initial conclusion was that their men had become so accustomed to positional warfare that they panicked easily when driven from their fortifications, and that this panic spread rapidly and destabilised other units.[251] Nevertheless, this ignores the fact that Austro-Hungarian officers had to take responsibility for the over-reliance upon fortifications. Far too many of the replacement drafts that reached the Eastern Front in 1916 had been given little or no field training, and the successes of the January battles had led to a belief that strong defensive positions were all that would be required.

It is worth looking in more detail at the inability of Austro-Hungarian officers to exercise greater authority over their men to ensure that the new drafts were brought up to a standard that would allow them to stand firm. Partly, this reflected the manner in which officers of the *k.u.k.* Army kept a great distance, both socially and physically, from their men. At the very top of the command structure, Conrad remained in Teschen with his staff officers, all of them living in comfortable surroundings with their wives and families, and in a similar manner army commanders did not spend time with their corps commanders, who in turn often failed to visit their divisions, and so on. It is an interesting reflection upon the society of the day that whilst Conrad correctly identified the need for close proximity to build camaraderie between officers, he failed to extend this to the relationships between officers of different levels of command, let alone between officers and the troops they commanded.

Such 'social distance' was of course commonplace in the early 20th century throughout Europe, but in the case of the German Army there was considerable respect amongst ordinary soldiers for officers from the traditional *Junker* background, many of whom represented families with several generations of military service and were strongly imbued with principles of leadership by example and service both to the army and to the troops under their command. The replacement of these aristocratic officers of the German Army with predominantly middle-class men hastily trained as officers during wartime might have been seen as an egalitarian development, but ironically most soldiers saw it as a retrograde step; the new officers did not have the same sense of duty of care towards their men. And whilst the ordinary rank and file had been prepared to tolerate additional luxuries for officers who were clearly devoted to looking after their troops, they were less willing to put up with men they regarded as being from their own class who took similar liberties. Similarly, the officers of the *k.u.k.* Army who were dispatched to the front line after the war began did not come close to the standards of those who had taken the army to war. The multi-lingual and multi-cultural nature of the Austro-Hungarian Empire had resulted before the war in regiments that were predominantly of the same background, and whilst their officers issued all their official orders in German, most had at least passable understanding of the language of their men. As replacement drafts were rushed to the front to make good the appalling losses of the first few months, they were often deployed in units who were not from the same ethnic or linguistic background, and replacement officers showed little willingness – and had little time – to learn the languages spoken by their men. Consequently, there was a widespread tendency for officers not to spend time training new drafts once they reached the front. This inability to communicate at an everyday level contributed to the growing fear in the empire about the reliability of troops who were not Austrian or Hungarian. The Czechs and Ruthenians (from modern-day western Ukraine) had long been suspected of having pro-Russian tendencies and there were many stories circulating about mass defections of entire battalions, and when Fourth and Seventh Armies collapsed in June 1914 such accusations were given new life. The reality was that Croatian and Polish formations proved to be the most brittle, and Czech battalions and regiments performed better than most.[252] However, by blaming the disaster on the already suspected nationalities within the empire, the Austro-Hungarian command structure – at every level – managed to avoid having to face the reality that it was the poor performance of officers before and during the Brusilov Offensive that was the real culprit.

There can also be little doubt that the Russians failed to make the most of their breakthrough in eastern Galicia and Bukovina. Although they drove Pflanzer-Baltin's increasingly disorganised troops 36 miles (60km) to the west and took tens of thousands of prisoners, a strategic victory could have been achieved. Unlike the northern breakthrough against Joseph Ferdinand's army, deep exploitation would have carried fewer risks in Galicia. In particular, this was a golden opportunity to unleash the large numbers of cavalry formations that the Russians had persisted in maintaining throughout the war. With almost nothing in their path, they could have disrupted rail movements over a wide area and made it impossible to restore the front line.[253]

Everywhere, troops were moving. Linsingen was concentrating his forces for a counteroffensive, while reinforcements were being scraped together to shore up the broken Austro-Hungarian armies in the south. Evert's staff were fully occupied with the sudden change of plan and emphasis, while in Brusilov's sector, Lechitsky struggled with the problems of success, trying to bring supplies and reinforcements to his far-flung units in order to sustain their advance. Behind the front, the additional corps allocated to Brusilov as compensation for the delays in the offensives of Northern and West Fronts struggled through the overloaded Russian rail network, and slowly, day by day, the opportunity for Kaledin's Eighth Army to exploit its initial successes at Lutsk diminished. All would depend on which side was able to strike first, and how effectively it could strike. If the Russians succeeded, the Central Powers would have no option but to abandon their offensive operations at Verdun and Asiago in order to release forces for the east. If they failed to exploit their gains, the prospects for the Entente Powers of the war being brought to a successful conclusion in what had been agreed at Chantilly would be the year of decision would be greatly diminished.

CHAPTER 7

DEALING WITH SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Brusilov had brought forward the start date of his offensive in direct response to the request for help from Italy. It is striking that despite this, he succeeded in tearing apart the Austro-Hungarian defences; by contrast, although they had lavish resources available, neither Kuropatkin nor Evert showed the slightest inclination to adhere to their original timetable, let alone accelerate their plans.

In the distant Alps, the crisis that had triggered Italy's plea for attacks to draw away Austro-Hungarian forces was reaching its peak. After their original successes, Conrad's troops ran into the same difficulties as every army of maintaining an offensive. Casualties had been heavy; reinforcements and reserves had to struggle forward to the front line, at a rate slower than the Italians could bring up their reserves; and artillery and ammunition was brought forward laboriously through the mountains in preparation for a resumption of the advance. Cramon later recalled events:

> It was suggested that the army group command had stationed the reserve divisions in too great a depth, so that it was impossible for them to attack in a timely manner …
>
> Of this I am certain: that the attack of the Russians in the east was not required to bring the Austrian offensive in the south Tyrol to a standstill; this had already occurred and it would only have been through the use of powerful new forces that it could have resumed, but these were not available for use.[254]

Far from having fresh troops available, Conrad had to start pulling units out of the Alps. Whatever little chance there might have been for the *k.u.k.* Army to defeat the 'treacherous Italians', as Conrad always referred to them, had effectively disappeared by the middle of June. Luigi Cadorna, commander of the Italian Army, had bolstered his front line in front of the Austro-Hungarian advance by transferring major forces from the Isonzo front, and even if the *k.u.k.* Army had no other distractions, it would have been hard-pushed to resume its advance. With a heavy heart, Conrad had to concede that the offensive should be abandoned, and substantial troops and artillery transferred to the Eastern Front. Archduke Eugen, commander of the forces that had battled their way forward across the Asiago plateau, had no choice but to pull back to a shorter battle line no more than 2 or 3 miles (3–5km) from where his men had commenced their advance, and issued a general order to the forces that had laboured forward through the mountains:

> As a result of the situation on the Russian Front, we have agreed conditionally with the German *OHL* the requirement for the transfer from the army group of two further infantry divisions … and heavy artillery. As a result, and also as there is no longer any prospect of the hopes expressed by the command of the army group on 14 June being fulfilled in the foreseeable future, AOK accepts that having waited until the last possible moment, it is forced to halt the army group's offensive.[255]

Both sides had lost about 150,000 men in another of the war's increasingly futile battles. There was a rush to apportion responsibility. Conrad blamed his former protégé Dankl for not proceeding with greater energy, while Dankl protested that the disproportionate allocation of artillery to Archduke Karl's XX Corps left the rest of his forces too weak; he requested that he be relieved of his command, and was dismissed by Archduke Eugen. Thereafter, Conrad and Dankl settled their differences and tried to hold Krauss responsible, but Eugen's chief of staff in turn complained that the operation had been hamstrung by Conrad's pre-war plans for an invasion of Italy along mountain ridges rather than through the Alpine valleys. Given that Krauss and Eugen had attempted to overrule Conrad's doctrine of attacking the enemy's main strength but had adhered to the chief of staff's preference for advancing along high ground, it seems somewhat selective for Krauss to blame a single element of Conrad's doctrine for the failure of the operation. Archduke Karl, too, regarded Conrad as responsible, as *AOK* had drawn up the general plan for the campaign without taking the trouble to acquaint itself with the realities of the terrain. There were even suggestions that Conrad's new wife Gina – who was of Italian blood – had somehow influenced her husband.[256]

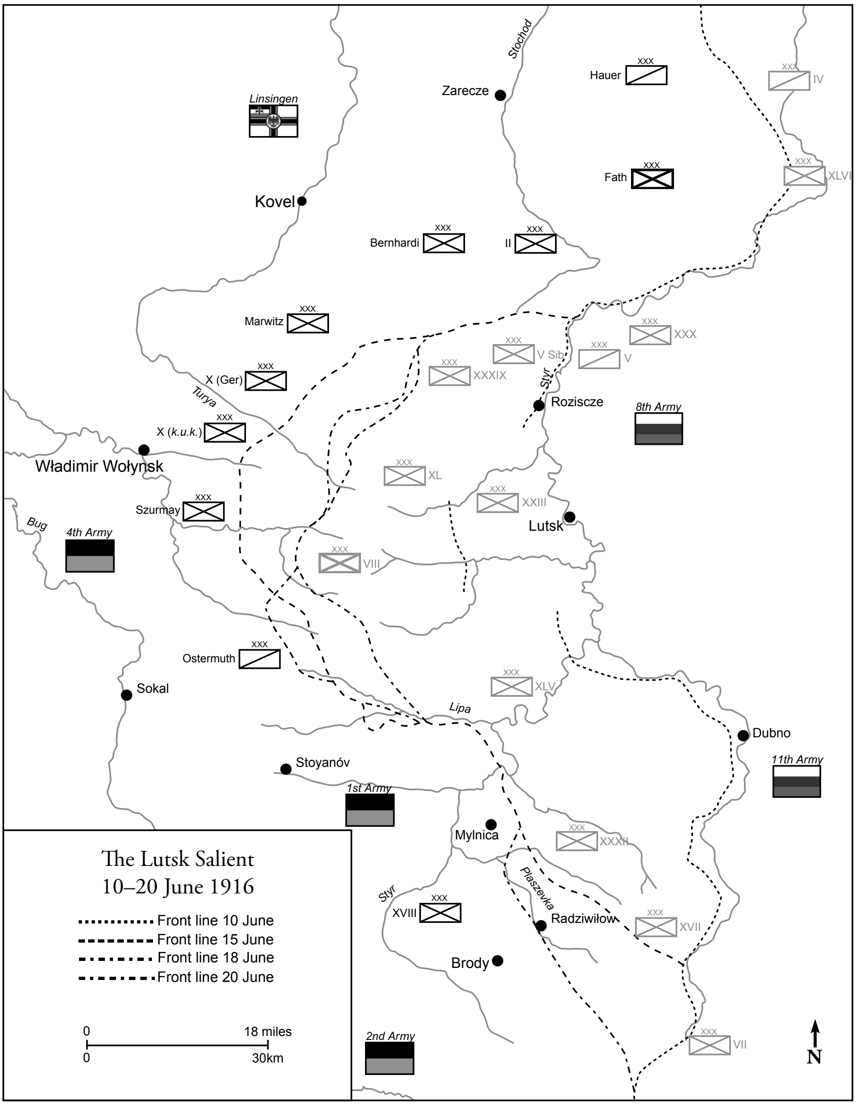
Conrad lamented the lost opportunity to strike a decisive blow at the 'treacherous Italians', and it is worth considering whether the *k.u.k.* Army might have accomplished more. Despite months of preparation and the transfer of the Austro-Hungarian Empire's best troops to the region, a critical breakthrough had failed to appear, but for entirely predictable reasons. Firstly, the terrain was hugely favourable to the defenders. Secondly, it was easier for Cadorna to bring up reinforcements than it was for Eugen to advance. Conrad had ordered repeated assaults on the Russians in the Carpathian Mountains in early 1915, and at no stage had his forces looked remotely likely to break through to relieve the besieged city of Przemyśl; in addition, Oskar Potiorek had attempted to invade Serbia via the mountainous Drina valley on two occasions in 1914, each ending in disaster. Similarly, Ivanov had tried in vain to burst through the Austro-Hungarian lines in the Carpathians in early 1915 to reach the Hungarian plateau, and repeated Italian attempts to force the line of the Isonzo valley through similar terrain had merely resulted in huge casualties. Despite this ample evidence that no army – least of all that of the Austro-Hungarian Empire – had succeeded in mounting effective operations in such terrain, Conrad had pressed forward with his plans. To an extent, it can be argued that this was driven by the fact that there was no other route for his troops to invade Italy, but in that case, serious consideration should have been given as to whether there was any likelihood of success at all in attacking the Italians. If it had been concluded that it would be difficult or impossible to achieve such a success, it might have been better to have agreed with Falkenhayn's proposals not to attack in the Alps, and to use the available troops elsewhere. However, this would have required a degree of agreement and cooperation between *OHL* and *AOK* that simply did not exist. Given Conrad's huge antipathy for the Italian state, the desire to strike at a nation that he felt had abandoned its pre-war allies was simply too great to be ignored.

In defence of Conrad, it can be argued that the Asiago offensive came close to bursting out of the mountains. However, as Cramon points out, the advance had actually stalled by the time Brusilov's offensive began, and with so many Italian troops transferred from the Isonzo valley, it is questionable whether a further advance could have been made under any circumstances. Even if Eugen had reached the north Italian plain and had pushed on to the Adriatic coast, it is unlikely to have resulted in a war-winning victory. The troops isolated in and around Venice would probably have been sustained by sea, as the British and French navies effectively controlled the Adriatic, and any attempt to defeat and destroy them would have been very costly. Even if it had proved possible to overwhelm them, it is likely that the *k.u.k.* Army would have been badly weakened and unable to reap any reward from its success.

An increasingly large factor in the calculations of both the Entente Powers and the Central Powers was Romania. In 1916, with Brusilov's armies moving forward again and particularly after the breakthrough that drove Pflanzer-Baltin's Seventh Army from eastern Galicia, there was a resurgence of discussions. Many felt that if Romania could be persuaded to enter the war, the appearance of its troops on the flank of the beleaguered *k.u.k.* Army might be a decisive factor. In these circumstances, the Russians were prepared to concede Romania's claims to territory in Bukovina, and as talks progressed it became increasingly likely that the Central Powers would face a new opponent before long. Inevitably, Berlin and Vienna were aware of developments, and began detailed planning for how they would respond. In this respect, they were helped by a simple reality of war in the early 20th century: for a predominantly rural population such as that of Romania, it was impossible to consider going to war when the harvest was due. Bucharest would therefore either have to commit to an early declaration of war – which was exceedingly unlikely, as it would take several weeks of supplies from Russia to bring the Romanian Army to a position where it could enter hostilities – or there would be a pause until after the harvest. There was therefore likely to be a little time before Romania would enter the war, and the Central Powers turned their attention to improving the military situation in an attempt to make Romanian intervention less likely.

On the battlefields of the Eastern Front, the Central Powers continued to react to the disasters that had befallen the *k.u.k.* Army. Tersztyánsky arrived to take command of Fourth Army on 10 June, and after several men had been assigned in a caretaker role, the shattered X Corps finally received a new commander, Feldmarschallleutnant Friedrich Csanády von Békés. His assessment of his command was grim; the division commanders, he reported, were depressed and exhausted, and the troops had only minimal battle value, with barely 4,500 combatants available.[257] Nevertheless, having withdrawn out of contact with the pursuing Russians, X Corps was able to take up a line that, with a cavalry brigade on its northern flank, extended as far as *Gruppe Bernhardi*. The opportunity for Kaledin to exploit his breakthrough faded with each passing day as the shattered units of Fourth Army were untangled and reorganised, with stragglers returning to the ranks and replacement drafts arriving from the west. All formations remained badly understrength – each corps of Fourth Army barely amounted to an infantry division in numbers – but even this was a huge improvement on the chaos that had prevailed immediately after the fall of Lutsk.

To the north of Fourth Army was *Gruppe Bernhardi*, preparing for its counterattack against Kaledin's army. On 10 June, one of its brigades was the


The Lutsk Salient
10–20 June 1916

Front line 10 June
Front line 15 June
Front line 18 June
Front line 20 June
0 18 miles
0 30km
N
Stochod
Zarecze
Hauer
XXX
IV
Linsingen
Fath
XLVI
Kovel
Bernhardi
II
Marwitz
XXX
V Sib
V
XXXIX
X (Ger)
Turya
Styr
Roziscze
8th Army
X (k.u.k.)
Władimir Wołynsk
XL
XXIII
Szurmay
Lutsk
Bug
4th Army
VIII
Ostermuth
Sokal
XLV
Lipa
Dubno
Stoyanów
11th Army
1st Army
Mylnica
XXXII
Plaszevka
Styr
XVIII
Radziwiłow
XVII
Brody
2nd Army
VII

victim of a surprise attack by Russian armoured cars with infantry from XXXIX Corps and was forced to retreat. Linsingen had no choice but to agree with the withdrawal, though he urged Bernhardi to hold the line of the River Stochod, as the first elements of German reinforcements were arriving and would soon be available.[258] Whilst Bernhardi might be confident that he could hold the line of the river, the Austro-Hungarian II Corps on his left flank proved more fragile. The Russian XXX Corps attacked this formation the day after the surprise attack against Bernhardi by the armoured cars, and made rapid progress on a broad front of over a mile. To the northeast of II Corps was *Gruppe Fath*, and a group amounting to a brigade of infantry was hastily gathered for a counterattack. The Russians were forced to concede much of the ground they had gained, but darkness brought exhaustion to both sides.

It was a frustrating experience for the Russians, but not wholly unexpected. The successes against the *k.u.k.* Army were due to a combination of factors: the weakness of the defenders; the careful artillery preparation; the extensive use of sap trenches to allow attacking infantry to assemble as close as possible to their objectives; and the fragility of their opponents. As the campaign moved on, the presence of German formations – as had repeatedly been the case in 1915 – stiffened the resolve of their Austro-Hungarian allies, and Russian attacks were increasingly frequently prepared without sufficient time for careful reconnaissance and planning. Nevertheless, the offensive was barely a week old, and already the damage inflicted upon the *k.u.k.* Army was so great that Brusilov and his army commanders remained confident that they would be able to find weaknesses that they would be able to exploit. In the meantime, there was widespread acclaim for Brusilov, a reflection both of the remarkable scale of his success and of the desperation of Russia to have something to celebrate in a war that had so far turned out so badly:

> Throughout this period I received hundreds of congratulatory telegrams and thanks from a wide part of Russian society. Everyone was enthused. Peasants, workers, the aristocracy, the clergy, intellectuals, students – all their messages were that they wanted to tell me that the hearts of all the Russian people beat as one in the name of the beloved homeland and the bloodied but victorious army. For me, this was a great comfort and support. Those were the best days of my life, because I experienced gratitude from all over Russia. As I recall, if not the first then one of the first was a telegram from the Caucasus from Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolayevich. 'Congratulations, I embrace and bless you.' After reading the telegram I was very moved and touched … Such impressions never fade, and I will carry them with me to my grave.[259]

With West Front still showing no signs of activity, Alexeyev transferred Third Army, on the southern wing of Evert's command, to Brusilov's Southwest Front. Immediately, Brusilov issued orders for this force to cooperate with Kaledin's army in order to eliminate the German forces that threatened the northern flank of Eighth Army. Kaledin continued to reorganise his men in preparation for a renewal of his attacks towards the north, but despite his successes, Brusilov found that the commander of Eighth Army showed little of the confidence that might have been expected:

> Kaledin was a strange character. Despite the complete success of his actions, he was tearful all the time, and in a critical situation with unpredictable events every day, dealing with his army and with death itself, he was half-hearted and hesitant. In turn, the troops saw little of him, and when they did they saw a surly, taciturn general who spoke curtly and did not thank them; they did not like or trust him.[260]

Knox's impression of Kaledin suggests that, whatever his merits, he was not the sort to inspire huge confidence in his men:

> Kaledin, like Brusilov, was a cavalryman, who had commanded 12th Cavalry Division with success in the war. He was, however, not at all of the *beau sabreur* type, but short-sighted, shy and silent, more of a student than a man of the world like his chief.
>
> … He gave me the impression of being a hard thinker, but of being, perhaps, without the necessary reserve of vital energy required to carry a difficult operation through.[261]

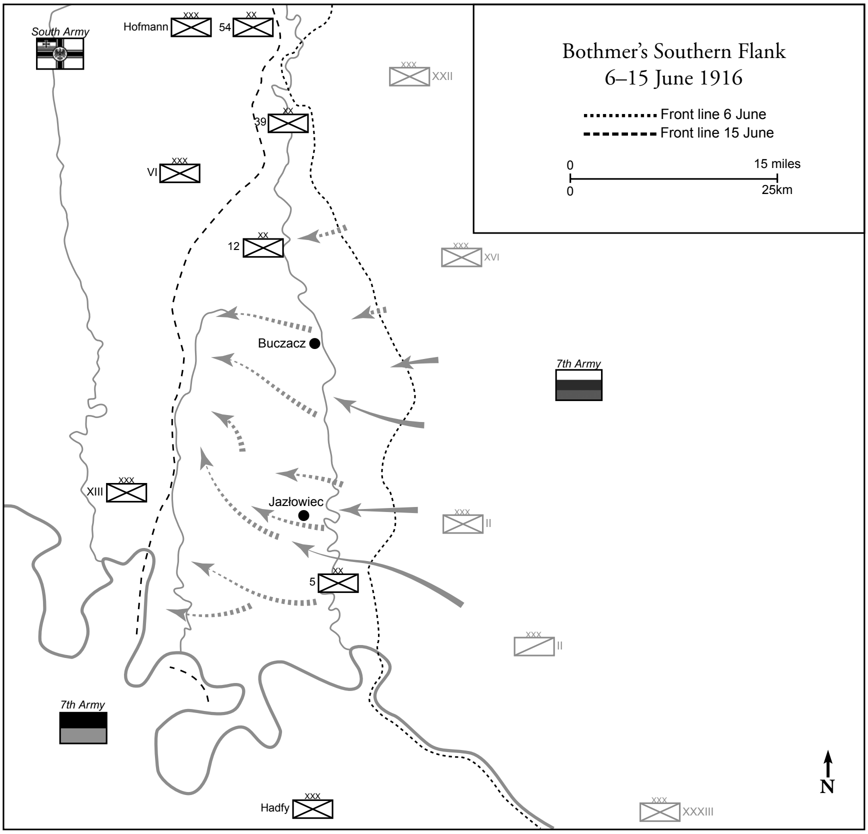
This was the other side of the state of Russia at the time. There might have been widespread jubilation at the victories that had been won, but given the huge setbacks of 1915 and the widespread tensions that Russia took into the war, morale and confidence remained fragile. Given that fragility, it was vital that successes continued to be delivered.

On the northern shoulder of the great breakthrough along the Dniester and Pruth, Shcherbachev's Seventh Army had failed to turn the southern flank of Bothmer's South Army, and the Russians were forced to pause while artillery was redeployed and ammunition brought forward. Anticipating further assaults, Bothmer had issued strict orders to the Austro-Hungarian VI and XIII Corps on his southern flank to hold their positions at all costs. On 13 June, fighting erupted as the Russians attempted to secure more of the west bank of the Strypa. The northern flank of Arz's VI Corps came under heavy pressure, and although initial Russian gains were reversed by a counterattack, renewed pressure during the afternoon led to bitter, confused fighting. A report that the Hungarian

39th *Honvéd* Infantry Division had been destroyed led to a general withdrawal, and by the time that Arz became aware that the report was untrue – although badly mauled, the division was still fighting well – it was too late to stop the abandonment of the Strypa river line. Fortunately for VI Corps, the day's fighting had exacted too high a cost on the Russian XXII Corps, particularly 3rd Finnish Rifle Division, to allow for full exploitation of the mistaken withdrawal.

Almost inevitably, the intensity of the fighting forced a pause the following day. Bothmer took the opportunity to extract weakened battalions from his northern flank and replaced them with fresher men from the Austro-Hungarian 38th Infantry Division; the troops who had been badly mauled in the Russian attacks were reorganised and either held as reserves behind the front, or sent to reinforce the weaker sectors, in particular the centre where troops had been repeatedly withdrawn to strengthen the flanks. At one stage, only a single regiment of the German 48th Reserve Infantry Division held a thinly manned line for several miles, but fortunately for Bothmer, Shcherbachev's efforts were concentrated on his flanks, not his centre.

On 15 June, Shcherbachev concentrated his efforts against Arz's VI Corps once more. The main assault fell on 39th *Honvéd* Infantry Division, and casualties on both sides mounted steadily through the morning; one account described the low hills as being covered with dead and wounded.[262] At midday, there was a pause as the Russians pulled back to their start line. Unusually for an Austro-Hungarian corps commander, Arz had spent much of the morning with the headquarters of his hard-pressed division rather than remaining some distance to the rear. As the fighting eased, he returned to his own headquarters, satisfied that the line would hold, but almost immediately there came news of a fresh disaster. Cossacks attacked the northern flank of the exhausted 39th *Honvéd* Infantry Division, with Russian infantry in close support, and as was frequently the case with Austro-Hungarian troops during this campaign, the defenders proved to be brittle. First just a part of the Hungarian division, then the rest, streamed back in complete rout. Isolated resistance by two determined battalions – one German, the other from the *k.u.k.* Army – proved futile. Eventually, Oberstleutnant Samuel Daubner, the commander of one of 39th *Honvéd* Infantry Division's brigades, managed to rally the survivors perhaps a mile (1.5km) or more to the west, but an inviting gap opened between the northern flank of the Hungarian reservists and the next division in line. If Shcherbachev had been able to exploit this with a rapid advance, the defences of South Army might have been rolled up, but yet again, there were no reserves at hand, and darkness brought a respite. During the night, German and Austro-Hungarian troops were scraped together


Bothmer's Southern Flank
6–15 June 1916
Front line 6 June
Front line 15 June
0
15 miles
0
25km
South Army
Hofmann
54
XXII
39
VI
12
XVI
Buczacz
7th Army
XIII
Jazłowiec
II
5
II
7th Army
Hadfy
XXXIII
N

to rebuild the defensive line. The following morning, Daubner launched a counterattack at first light. Much of the ground that the Russians had taken was recovered, but at a high cost in terms of casualties. Nevertheless, the position of VI Corps was considerably improved, not least by the arrival of the first elements of the German 105th Infantry Division from Macedonia.

The pressure on Pflanzer-Baltin's battered Seventh Army eased for a few days while the Russians brought up supplies, but the respite was short-lived. On 16 June, Lechitsky tried to get his advance going again with a thrust by his III Cavalry Corps towards the west between the Dniester and Pruth; once again, the weakness of cavalry was demonstrated when even the shaken defences of *Gruppe Hadfy* proved capable of beating off the cavalry attack. However, the main Russian effort was towards the south, where Lechitsky had concentrated XI and XII Corps and the two divisions of the disbanded Combined Corps.

Opposing them were the troops of the Austro-Hungarian XI Corps, still clinging to their positions around Czernowitz. Once again, the Russian artillery began a detailed preparation while probing attacks tested the Czernowitz defences; helplessly, the defenders reported that they could see bridging equipment being made ready to the northwest of the city, but they lacked the artillery to disrupt Russian preparations. All that Korda could do was move his modest reserves – a little over a brigade of infantry – to cover the area. Just as a gap had opened in the north between Szurmay on the southern flank of Fourth Army and the adjacent First Army, so a gap had opened in the south between those elements of Seventh Army that withdrew west and those that retreated to the south, and once again the gap was covered by cavalry, in this case no more than 2,400 combatants in *Kavallerie Korps Brudermann*.

The plan to restore the situation in the south was built upon Bothmer's South Army attacking southwards, while Seventh Army held its ground. Although replacement drafts had arrived, the only additional forces expected were two battalions of *Landsturm*. The previously expected reinforcements, the German 105th Infantry Division and the *k.u.k.* 48th Infantry Division, had instead been assigned to Bothmer's counterattack group rather than to shore up Seventh Army. In such circumstances, Pflanzer-Baltin doubted the ability of his forces to act as the anvil against which Bothmer's hammer would crush the Russians, but the reality was that with so many troops committed in Italy and at Verdun, it was not possible to provide sufficient men both for the counterattack and to strengthen the defensive line of Seventh Army. The increasing length of front line that Pflanzer-Baltin had to cover exacerbated the problem further, and there was no prospect of his sending additional troops to reinforce Korda.

Throughout 17 June, the Russian artillery preparation around Czernowitz continued. At 4 p.m., troops from Barantsov's XI Corps moved forward and swiftly drove the defenders from their shattered positions. Fighting now raged through the city itself through the night; with his few reserves covering the Pruth crossings to the northwest, Korda had no other forces to throw into the battle and early on 18 June he ordered the abandonment of Czernowitz. The terrain over which the battle was being fought was dominated by three rivers running broadly in parallel – the Dniester in the north, the Pruth in the middle, and the Siret in the south. With Czernowitz lost, XI Corps was to fall back to the line of the Siret. Inevitably, the retreat degenerated into chaos. Two artillery batteries were abandoned when they were unable to force their way along roads choked with rear area units. The last defenders of Czernowitz were fortunate to avoid encirclement, but had to abandon much of their equipment. The city itself had been occupied by the Russian Eighth Army in the first months of the war, and during this period the civilian population – particularly the Jews – had suffered badly at the hands of often ill-disciplined troops. There was therefore widespread concern about the return of the Russians, and many civilians attempted to flee, adding to the congestion on the roads running south and west. On this occasion, their fears proved unfounded. Lechitsky's troops behaved far better during their period of occupation than those of Eighth Army had done in 1914–15.

To add to the woes of the retreating units of the Austro-Hungarian XI Corps, the weather turned stormy and turned many of the dusty roads into thick mud. Exhausted from the fighting around Czernowitz, the men struggled to the Siret while fighting off repeated attacks by Russian cavalry (which, as usual, achieved little more than harassment) and reached their positions on 18 June. Pflanzer-Baltin ordered Korda to hold his new positions at all costs; he must have known that, having lost much of their artillery and nearly all their rear area support services, the ability of XI Corps to resist a further determined assault was almost negligible. Far from receiving artillery support to offset the weakness of the infantry as Seeckt had requested, the army was weakened by the loss of many guns during the retreat from Czernowitz, including two precious batteries of heavy artillery. Although there were initial hopes that Pflanzer-Baltin's army would be able to exert pressure with its northern flank when Bothmer was ready to launch his counterattack, the reality was that it would be a considerable achievement for Seventh Army to survive the coming days without conceding further ground.

Pflanzer-Baltin had been dismayed to learn that the troops he was expecting were being sent to Bothmer, but might have consoled himself that this would allow Bothmer to launch a relieving attack from the north. Now, both Pflanzer-Baltin and Bothmer learned that the Austro-Hungarian 48th Infantry Division was no longer going to be assigned to either of them. The deteriorating situation on the northern flank of Puhallo's First Army, where the Russians threatened to push down towards Brody, required immediate attention. Böhm-Ermolli, commander of the neighbouring Second Army and prior to Brusilov's offensive also charged with overseeing First Army, had already dispatched whatever troops he could spare to the sector and knew that he had no further freedom of manoeuvre. The Russian gains here were doubly threatening; there was concern that if it came under heavy pressure, First Army might prove to be as fragile as Fourth and Seventh Armies, resulting in damage that might prove to be irreparable; and both *OHL* and *AOK* were mindful that, whilst the Russians had not yet struck towards Lemberg, they might still do so in the near future, and any widening of the gap between First and Fourth Armies would make this ever more likely. If Brusilov even attempted such an exploitation of Kaledin's success, it could have catastrophic consequences for the *k.u.k.* Army. Preventing this therefore had to take priority over Bothmer's counterattack.

Throughout 17 and 18 June, repeated attacks by Russian troops along the front of Second Army further increased Böhm-Ermolli's fears, though his troops successfully held their positions. However, a further request for reinforcements brought the brusque response from Conrad that no troops were available; First and Second Armies would have to make do with the resources that they already had.[263] Had the Russian Eleventh Army pressed the issue with more determination, a new crisis might have erupted and altered the course of the entire campaign, but Sakharov contented himself with probing attacks and artillery harassment. On the one hand, such caution was understandable given the limited resources at his disposal, but on the other hand, a great opportunity lay before him. However, he seems to have lacked the energy and initiative that the situation required. Knox's assessment of him is characteristically sharp:

> Sakharov … and his chief of staff Shishkevich, and general quartermaster Cheremissov, were less well spoken of [than other Southwest Front army commanders] … One young officer tells me that Sakharov was a good corps commander, but is quite unable to tackle the problems of a wider nature that fall to the army commander. His chief of staff, Shishkevich, he characterises as 'ungifted'.[264]

Whilst the Russians facing Second Army might be reticent about pressing their advantage, the same was not true in the south, where Lechitsky received orders directly from Alexeyev to pursue the retreating enemy energetically after the capture of Czernowitz towards the Romanian frontier. Clearly, there were political considerations at work here. If victorious Russian troops were to advance to the border, this might tip Romania into entering the war against the Central Powers, and whilst Romania's troops were relatively poorly equipped, the appearance of a substantial force of fresh men next to the defeated Austro-Hungarian Seventh Army might precipitate a further collapse. However, executing these new orders posed problems. Just as the few available roads – which deteriorated whenever the weather turned unfavourable – hindered Pflanzer-Baltin's retreating troops, so Ninth Army now struggled to bring forward supplies to sustain its advance. In addition, the railway bridges that the retreating *k.u.k.* Army had destroyed also needed repair and the railway lines returned to service. Consequently, Lechitsky had to limit his pursuit to two infantry divisions and a cavalry corps, holding back the formations of XI and XII Corps.[265]

Even this pursuit was sufficient to cause considerable difficulties. The last troops retreating from Czernowitz were unable to break contact with their pursuers and had to cross the Siret whilst still engaged in combat. Mikhail Nikolayevich Promtov, the cavalry commander tasked with leading the pursuit, was determined to force the river line and complete the conquest of Bukovina, and his troops crossed the Siret due south of Czernowitz on 19 June. The defenders were in no state to put up prolonged resistance and once the advantage of holding a river line was lost, they had no alternative but to withdraw. At the same time, Brudermann's cavalry came under attack, forcing them to pull back and thus increasing the strain upon Pflanzer-Baltin's far-flung units. The few battalions of *Landsturm* that had been assigned to Seventh Army as reinforcements were dispatched to Bukovina, more in hope than expectation that the reservists would be able to halt the Russians. On 20 June, Promtov's cavalry reached the foothills of the Carpathians. An improvised infantry brigade under the command of Oberstleutnant Daniel Papp, which had been in continuous combat with the Russians since the fighting for Czernowitz, continued its slow retreat from one temporary defensive line to the next. Finally, Conrad had to concede that it was impossible for Seventh Army to hold on, and Bothmer was ordered to release an infantry brigade that could be sent to Korda. An infantry division was ordered to move from the Tyrol to Bukovina, with the possibility of another to follow. Whilst such reinforcements were welcome, it would take many days for them to arrive in the critical theatre, where the situation deteriorated almost by the hour.

Further to the north, these days were the time for Linsingen to launch the attack that was intended to restore the front by attacking the Russian salient around Lutsk. A new group had been assembled under the command of General Georg von der Marwitz, who had fought with distinction on the Eastern Front before being replaced due to ill health; he had then been assigned to command VI Corps on the Western Front. He now inserted his men between the western flank of Bernhardi's group and Fourth Army. Having been heavily involved in heavy fighting in recent days, *Gruppe Bernhardi* and Fourth Army would play secondary roles, supporting Marwitz's thrust, though should the advance encounter substantial resistance, Linsingen expected Fourth Army, supported by Puhallo's First Army further south, to try to outflank the Russians, and in order to allow for easier coordination of all the forces that were involved, Conrad agreed to a suggestion from Falkenhayn that First Army should become part of Linsingen's army group. Until now, the commander of Second Army, Eduard von Böhm-Ermolli, had overseen First Army; his command now shrank back to his own army. Due to delays in assembling the heavy artillery that was being transferred from elsewhere, Linsingen put the start date for the counteroffensive back to 16 June.

The proposed counteroffensive was a reasonable plan, but only in the context of the state of affairs when it was drawn up; it took little account of further developments. In particular, Brusilov was moving reinforcements in the shape of V Siberian Corps into precisely the area over which Linsingen intended to attack towards Lutsk. Nor did Brusilov intend to sit passively while Linsingen prepared his assault. With Third Army assigned to him, the commander of Southwest Front ordered Lesh to attack towards Pinsk. The other armies were to continue to develop their plans in accordance with existing instructions: Kaledin would push forward towards Kovel, while Lechitsky in the south completed the capture of Bukovina and eastern Galicia. Shcherbachev was to continue to pressurise the opposing forces to prevent them from having the freedom to transfer men elsewhere, and Sakharov's Eleventh Army was to cooperate with the southern flank of Kaledin's Eighth Army to overrun the area immediately south of the Russian salient around Lutsk.

In preparation for such an attack, Sakharov's troops had been reconnoitring the Austro-Hungarian defences before them, largely along the River Plaszevka.[266] During the afternoon of 14 June, the Russian artillery began a detailed bombardment of the positions of the Austro-Hungarian 25th Infantry Division northwest of Brody, and this was followed by an infantry attack the following morning. The first line of defences fell to the Russians, mainly from XXXII Corps, who then beat off two counterattacks. Covered by two battalions of infantry, the defeated elements of 25th Infantry Division pulled out and withdrew to the west. Unusually, the attackers had cavalry available and immediately dispatched the Transamur Cossack Division in pursuit. Confused fighting followed, with retreating infantry and artillery repeatedly engaging groups of riders in running battles. Yet again, the performance of the cavalry proved to be disappointing, and did little to increase the scale of the Russian success.[267] Nevertheless, casualties in Puhallo's army were substantial, with perhaps 10,000 men lost. Russian losses were also heavy, with the result that the ineffectual harassment by cavalry was the only measure taken to try to exploit the success.[268]

Whilst the retreat imposed upon Puhallo's First Army was a useful achievement for Sakharov, its real value lay in the disruption of the planned counteroffensive by the Central Powers. Only 61st Infantry Division would be able to attack from the south. Nevertheless, other forces were now assembling. Tersztyánsky had gathered what he could of Fourth Army to cover the approaches to Władimir Wołynsk, and the German X Corps had arrived to take up position – slightly confusingly – immediately to the northeast of the Austro-Hungarian X Corps, with the two formations separated by the River Turya. Having served on the Western Front throughout the war, the German 19th and 20th Infantry Divisions were regarded as battle-hardened and experienced, and Generalleutnant Walther von Lüttwitz's corps was therefore welcomed as a valuable addition to Linsingen's forces. However, coming from the inferno of the Battle of Verdun, X Corps was not as strong as it looked on paper.

The Russians were aware of the German forces assembling against them, and this reinforced Brusilov's doubts about pressing on towards the west until the threat to the northern flank of Eighth Army had been eliminated. Kaledin gathered four infantry divisions immediately in the path of the planned German advance; the intention was to attack towards Kovel with this force, but it would also be available to deal with any German assault.[269] At a time when the Austro-Hungarian defences remained fragile in the extreme, the diversion of such a strong force effectively precluded further advances to the west and southwest, but to an extent this was forced upon Brusilov and Kaledin not only by the presence of Linsingen's forces, but also by the failure of Gillenschmidt's cavalry to exert meaningful pressure from its position on the northern flank of Eighth Army. In addition, some of the formations allocated to stopping Linsingen's counterattack had already suffered heavy losses; Winogradsky recorded that 14th Infantry Division, of which his artillery was a part, had started the campaign with 16,000 combatants, but was now down to just 10,000.[270]

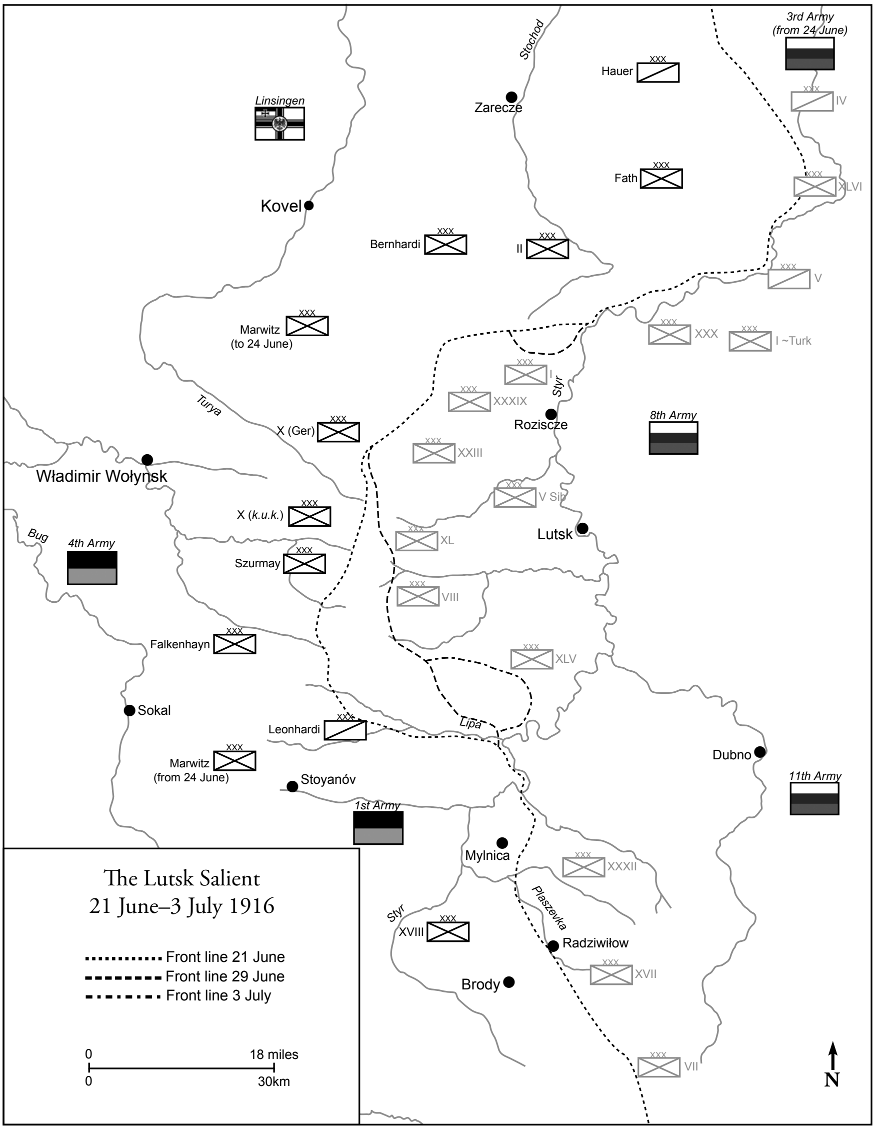
On 15 June, Linsingen issued definitive orders for his counteroffensive. All the forces arrayed around the bulge created by Kaledin's advance through Lutsk – Puhallo's First Army in the south, the cavalry divisions of Feldmarschallleutnant Johann Ostermuth in the gap to Puhallo's left, Tersztyánsky's Fourth Army, the German X Corps under Marwitz, and finally *Gruppe Bernhardi* in the north – were to mount concentric, mutually supporting attacks. The forces amounted to a little over twelve infantry divisions, of which four were German, and six were relatively fresh. An additional two divisions were en route from France. Opposing them, Kaledin also had about twelve infantry divisions. These numbers, though, are misleading. Russian divisions at this time had sixteen infantry battalions, compared to twelve in Austro-Hungarian divisions and only nine in German divisions. The forces of Fourth Army remained very weak both numerically and in terms of morale, and most of Kaledin's formations had also been blooded during their advance to and beyond Lutsk; however, they at least had a successful opening to the campaign behind them, and would have been confident that they could prevail, particularly against the *k.u.k.* Army. They would also have the advantage of being defenders in a war where defensive firepower had proved so difficult to overcome.

If the attack was to succeed, it was important that there were no further setbacks. On the eve of the counteroffensive, *AOK* issued a proclamation to the troops in the field:

> If, with the newly arrived additional troops, we are not only to restore the situation but also to achieve a positive victory, it is necessary that all officers and men do their utmost to hold the current battle positions. In the face of local enemy advances or even for operational reasons, there must be no retreat.[271]

Puhallo's northern wing duly launched its attacks as ordered on 16 June. In one sector, there were encouraging signs of progress with the infantry moving forward about 2 miles (3km), but the advance was uneven. Strong pockets of Russian resistance proved impossible to subdue and posed major threats to the flanks of the advancing infantry, who had to abandon most of their gains in order to avoid being isolated. Ostermuth's cavalry achieved even less, running into powerful Russian formations of both infantry and cavalry. Moving forward cautiously, the formations of Tersztyánsky's Fourth Army met little resistance at first, encountering more difficulty from having to advance through swampy terrain made worse by summer rainstorms than from Russian defenders. Marwitz, too, made good progress, advancing about 4 miles (7km), but Bernhardi ran straight into the fresh V Siberian Corps. By the end of the day, he was struggling to hold his starting positions, let alone to advance.

Whilst the first day had seen limited progress, this was largely in sectors where the Russians did not contest the battlefield; where they stood firm, the advance had stopped abruptly. Over the next two days, Linsingen tried again, but everywhere the counteroffensive ran into stronger defences than on the first day. Puhallo immediately had to divert troops after an intercepted radio message suggested that Sakharov's Eleventh Army was about to attack towards Brody. Over the next few days, this drive, by the Russian XXXII Corps, made steady progress, drawing in what few reserves were available to Puhallo. As a result, the northern wing of First Army made no further progress at all, and was even forced to concede ground as the Russian advance towards Brody threatened to expose its flank. Ostermuth's cavalry also achieved little, and an exasperated Tersztyánsky asked Puhallo – under whose overall command the cavalry was operating – to urge greater vigour.



The Lutsk Salient
21 June–3 July 1916

Front line 21 June
Front line 29 June
Front line 3 July
0
18 miles
0
30km
N
3rd Army
(from 24 June)
Linsingen
Stochod
Hauer
Zarecze
IV
Fath
XLVI
Kovel
Bernhardi
II
V
Marwitz
(to 24 June)
XXX
I ~Turk
I
Styr
XXXIX
Turya
X (Ger)
Rozisćze
8th Army
XXIII
Władimir Wołynsk
V Sib
X (k.u.k.)
Lutsk
Bug
4th Army
XL
Szurmay
VIII
Falkenhayn
XLV
Sokal
Leonhardi
Lipa
Dubno
Marwitz
(from 24 June)
Stoyanów
11th Army
1st Army
Mylnica
XXXII
Plaszevka
Styr
XVIII
Radziwiłow
Brody
XVII
VII
xxx

An attempt to improve matters by adding the Austro-Hungarian 61st Infantry Division to Ostermuth's attack failed when the Russian VIII Corps counterattacked in strength. The infantry division showed as little resilience as other *k.u.k.* units and fell back in disarray, losing large numbers of men. Whilst the lack of progress in Linsingen's attack was a blow, the retreat of 61st Infantry Division risked exposing the rear areas, where further reinforcements were assembling, to the Russian advance. Linsingen ordered his forces in the area to hold out rather than try to push forward; further retreats had to be avoided at all costs.

The failure of the southern elements of Linsingen's forces to make any headway meant that if Tersztyánsky's Fourth Army advanced, it would find its southern flank exposed. Linsingen believed that the strongest Russian forces were before Marwitz and only relatively weak units were in Fourth Army's path. It should therefore be possible for Tersztyánsky to advance quickly and thus facilitate Marwitz's attack, by threatening the flank of the main Russian force. The reality was that Fourth Army was also facing substantial forces, primarily VIII Corps, and although there were initial gains on 17 June, these were swiftly reversed. In vain, Linsingen insisted that there should be no further retreat and the advance should be resumed, but instead there was growing confusion and chaos as the fragile units of Fourth Army rapidly lost their cohesion.

On the northern flank of the Lutsk salient, Marwitz tried in vain to advance against the Russian XL Corps. It was only the left flank of Marwitz's corps, in conjunction with *Gruppe Bernhardi*, that was able to make any real progress. Here, the German infantry ground forward about 3 miles (5km) over three days in the face of determined resistance, with heavy losses on both sides in fighting that was identical to that in Flanders, France and elsewhere. It was still far short of the decisive counteroffensive that the Germans had expected would restore the front line.[272]

To date, the First World War had been marked by attempts at offensives that usually failed. The rare events were the successful attacks, particularly those of Mackensen in 1915 and Brusilov a year later. They had features in common: careful reconnaissance, effective cooperation between infantry and artillery, and weak opponents. There were many occasions when these factors failed to produce good results, but there were practically no occasions when there were good results without these factors. Linsingen's counteroffensive was organised rapidly, and without the meticulous attention to detail that characterised the preparations of both Mackensen and Brusilov. Furthermore, the assault was directed against confident Russian units, still flushed with success after their initial attacks. In such circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the assault – further hamstrung by the necessity of using badly understrength *k.u.k.* formations of questionable morale – failed to restore the front line in the manner that was expected.

In a similar manner, these days saw an attempt by the Russian V Siberian Corps, V Cavalry Corps and XXX Corps to attack towards the north, near the base of the Lutsk salient. Throughout 16 June, the eastern part of *Gruppe*

Bernhardi and much of the neighbouring *Gruppe Fath* came under constant artillery fire, preventing these troops from assisting in Linsingen's counteroffensive. During the following night, Andrei Medardovich Zayontchovsky's XXX Corps penetrated into the German front lines on the eastern flank of *Gruppe Fath*; there were almost no reserves available to try to restore the situation. The following morning, a mixed group of four squadrons of cavalry and an improvised force of infantry attempted in vain to recapture the lost positions. Bernhardi was forced to divert forces that he had planned to commit to the counteroffensive, and both sides were dragged into a futile, messy struggle to assert themselves in swampy terrain.

By the end of 17 June, it was clear to General Heinrich Fath and Feldmarschallleutnant Julius Kaiser, commander of the Austro-Hungarian II Corps and currently subordinated to Bernhardi, that they would struggle to hold their line without reinforcements, let alone advance. They submitted a request to Linsingen for help, and he passed it on to Conrad with the additional note that the German reinforcements for the Eastern Front were already allocated to the counteroffensive; there was therefore a requirement for additional Austro-Hungarian troops. Conrad replied that he had none to give, even though the offensive against Italy had been abandoned. Even if the Italian *Strafexpedition* had succeeded in breaking through to the Adriatic, it is highly unlikely that any troops would have been available immediately for transfer – the balance of forces in Italy was such that Eugen's armies would have had their hands full holding off the relief efforts that the Italian Army would certainly have made whilst attempting to grind down and overwhelm the Italian troops that would have been surrounded in the Veneto. Besides, any reinforcements that were available were desperately needed to shore up the collapsed Fourth and Seventh Armies. Linsingen repeated instructions he had already given on several occasions: the Russians were not as strong as feared; retreat was out of the question; and a determined counterattack would suffice to restore the front line.

The Russians had no intention of giving up the ground they had gained, however modest this might be. Elements of XLVI and XXX Corps attempted to push forward on 18 June, and Fath hastily abandoned his plans for further counterattacks in an attempt to deal with the new crisis that rapidly developed. The dead and wounded multiplied on both sides as the front line barely moved – further evidence, if any were needed, that any attack had to be planned with painstaking detail if it was to stand any chance of success. Winogradsky commented on the severity of the fighting, and the marked differences with the previous year:

> One could judge the intensity of the battle by the consumption of ammunition, which amounted to 13,000 rounds for the thirty-six guns of 15th Brigade and about 1,500 for the 1st Battery of the 14th, all in one afternoon.
>
> … Having become accustomed to relatively easy success in 1915, when due to a shortage of [artillery] ammunition our infantry had to bear the brunt of combat, [the enemy] was disagreeably surprised by having to deal with well-provisioned artillery, which energetically supported the infantry and inflicted losses on him reminiscent of the setbacks of autumn 1914.
>
> … Our division had an encounter with Germans who had positioned several heavy (150mm and 210mm) batteries behind Korytnitza Wood and at 11 a.m. bombarded the 56th [Regiment] in the Oumanetz sector. Recently constructed and lacking shelters, its trenches were naturally destroyed in short order so that without too much difficulty the enemy was able to take our first line at 2 p.m. But now, the Germans fell into a trap: attacks in their flanks from neighbouring units from 15th Infantry Division and 55th Regiment, supported by shrapnel from my first gun group, routed them and inflicted heavy losses, and they hastily withdrew to the cover of Korytnitza Wood.[273]

Whilst 55th Regiment was part of the same division as the troops that had been forced back by the initial German attack, it was relatively unusual – even after two years of war – for neighbouring Russian divisions to cooperate in the manner in which 15th Infantry Division came to the aid of 14th Infantry Division, something that was natural for the opponents of Russia.

After three days of disappointment, commanders at every level, from the front line divisions to *AOK*, took stock. The southern flank of the counteroffensive had failed completely; the units of Puhallo's First Army were now actually some distance behind their start lines. Fourth Army had used its limited strength to recover some ground, but only where the Russians chose not to contest their advance – wherever the Russians had dug in and resisted, they had stopped Tersztyánsky's troops in their tracks. Marwitz had made limited progress before hitting a tough line of Russian defences, and the formations on his eastern flank had spent the days in bloody exchanges without gaining ground. The arrival of two additional divisions from the Western Front – 43rd Reserve Infantry Division and 11th Bavarian Infantry Division – at least provided an opportunity to exert additional pressure, particularly as they detrained behind Puhallo's and Bernhardi's fronts respectively. This allowed Linsingen to propose a renewal of his concentric assault, with the new reinforcements adding weight where it was most needed. In addition, he attempted to bring order to the uncoordinated efforts of the cavalry between First and Fourth Armies by creating a new attack group under the command of General Eugen von Falkenhayn, brother of the chief of the German general staff, who would have Ostermuth's cavalry corps, the German 9th Cavalry Division, the newly arrived 43rd Reserve Infantry Division, and the Austro-Hungarian 61st Infantry Division at his disposal. Falkenhayn would have until 21 June to organise his forces, as would Bernhardi, under whose command 11th Bavarian Infantry Division would operate.

Conrad was doubtful that the new plan had any higher probability of success than the original assault, and wrote to Falkenhayn at *OHL*:

> Unless new forces are sent forthwith towards Stoyanóv – Sokal [i.e. to cover the gap between First and Fourth Armies], a powerful Russian threat along this axis towards Lemberg will rapidly make the entire east Galician front untenable.[274]

With the Italian offensive abandoned, Conrad was able to divert limited resources to the area, but regardless of his past misjudgements, his assessment on this occasion was indisputable. In addition, Lechitsky's troops were actually closer to Lemberg after their advance south of the Dniester, and it was conceivable that the city – an essential communication node for the Central Powers – might be threatened from two directions at the same time. Falkenhayn agreed with Conrad's assessment of the risk to Lemberg, but felt that even if it was unable to advance towards Lutsk, his brother's group would easily be strong enough to stop any Russian attack that might ultimately threaten Lemberg; any Russian forces that it tied down would be unavailable to stop Linsingen's main assault with Marwitz's X Corps.

Even as the reinforcements detrained and organised themselves, Marwitz's troops continued to struggle forward. On 20 June, a wireless intercept suggested that the Russian XL Corps was about to pull back to a new line, and Linsingen immediately ordered an energetic pursuit. There were some encouraging gains, and plans were made for a more powerful attack on 21 June, in which 11th Bavarian Infantry Division would take part. For the soldiers of this formation, it was the second time they had been deployed on the Eastern Front; the previous year, they had played a major part in Mackensen's offensive, and had played a leading role in the recapture of Przemyśl before being transferred to the forces that invaded Serbia in the autumn. Since then, they had been fighting in the west, including the grinding battle of attrition at Verdun. Now, before they could deploy, the Russians struck again. XL Corps had indeed pulled back a short distance, but XXX Corps sought to make the most of the gains achieved against *Gruppe Fath*. The Russian attack proved as bloody as Linsingen's assaults, and although the Austro-Hungarian 4th Infantry Division was forced to give ground, the cost was too high for the advance to be sustained. A furious counterattack was launched the following day, driving the Russians back to their start line. Perhaps a mile of ground had – briefly – changed hands, at the cost of hundreds of lives.[275]

Despite the ongoing fighting, both sides knew that the decisive moment would come when all their reinforcements had arrived. Trains carried troops from the Western Front and the Alps to reinforce the battered armies of the Central Powers, while the Russian rail system brought men south from West and Northern Fronts. Falkenhayn and other commanders continued to insist that with the reinforcements already en route, the *k.u.k.* Army should be able to resist provided its men at every level showed more resolve. The relationship between *AOK* and *OHL*, never warm, deteriorated still further as Falkenhayn continued to press for the appointment of Mackensen as overall commander in the southern part of the Eastern Front. Conrad was prepared to see Pflanzer-Baltin's Seventh Army and Bothmer's South Army assigned to Mackensen's command, but only on condition of further German reinforcements. Falkenhayn's brusque dismissal of this suggestion did nothing to improve relations. Nor was Falkenhayn's next proposal greeted with any greater enthusiasm – that Hindenburg should take command of the Eastern Front south of the Pripet Marshes. Falkenhayn argued that Hindenburg's personal prestige, and 'the magic of his name' would have a hugely beneficial impact upon the shaken formations struggling to stop Brusilov; however, Hindenburg himself was not in favour, not least because by this new role would explicitly result in his losing control of *Ober Ost*. As a result, he would end up with a smaller command than before, and moreover one that was largely made up of Austro-Hungarian troops. In his memoirs, Cramon hinted that this might have been a significant part of Falkenhayn's motive – a further move in the longstanding feud between *OHL* and *Ober Ost*.[276] But if Falkenhayn had political motives for making the proposal, Hindenburg also had political motives for turning it down. The faction that had gathered around him was now pushing for Hindenburg to be appointed chief of the general staff, in place of Falkenhayn. Such a move would not be possible if Hindenburg were dispatched to the southern sector of the Eastern Front.

Undaunted, Falkenhayn now suggested that Hindenburg should take command of the entire Eastern Front. He would be directly subordinated to *OHL*, but no movements of *k.u.k.* troops would take place without Conrad's consent. After the experience of the previous year, when Mackensen's command had notionally been under the control of *AOK* but to all practical purposes functioned as if it was commanded by Falkenhayn's *OHL*, Conrad can have had little doubt that his role in this new proposed structure would be minimal, and it was therefore no surprise when this proposal, too, was rejected.

Ludendorff's memoirs include some interesting observations on how the chain of command was organised:

> The previous command arrangements were largely the result of quieter times, but were not appropriate for the circumstances that prevailed during Russian attacks. On these occasions, quick action was required. Exchanges between the two high commands in Charleville or Pless [where *OHL* had been located] and Teschen [the home of *AOK*] could result in considerable time being wasted, which was never justifiable. Already, during the great March offensive [at Lake Naroch], this command structure had proved difficult. Friction was only avoided by our outstanding cooperation with Field Marshal Prince Leopold of Bavaria's army group [immediately south of *Ober Ost*] and its subordinated *Armeegruppe Woyrsch*. Since this time, thoughts about a united command on the Eastern Front never disappeared from daily affairs. First of all, there was the question of the subordination of these army groups to *Ober Ost*. But – as is always required in wartime – it was necessary to look further. *Ober Ost* would have to have command of the entire Eastern Front from the Gulf of Riga to the Carpathians. Hard lessons had to be learned before this was achieved. External matters that had nothing to do with the issue prevented a solution. In particular, the so-called prestige question meant that it was only with difficulty that the *k.u.k.* high command could accept a reduction in its tactical control of *k.u.k.* troops. In all command arrangements, *AOK* had jealously defended its position to prevent the appearance of German supremacy in military matters. On the German side, the prime concern was for purely military issues.[277]

The closing sentence is in stark contrast to Cramon's suggestion that German military politics might have played a part in some of the proposals that were being discussed. However, whilst there can be no disputing the depth of enmity between the *Ober Ost* group and Falkenhayn's faction, Ludendorff's memoirs make practically no mention of the issue at any stage.

It is worth pointing out that whilst he cannot have been oblivious to the scheming of those around him, Hindenburg did not personally involve himself in the intrigues. Nevertheless, his experience of administering the considerable territorial regions under the control of *Ober Ost* left him strongly inclined to demand substantial annexations of territory after the war, and this further increased his popularity with those on the right wing of German politics, particularly industrialists and others who could see substantial profit in greater exploitation of areas such as the Baltic States. At first, the tensions between *OHL* and *Ober Ost* had been largely limited to military matters, but Falkenhayn did not regard annexations as a suitable objective, fearing that such demands would make it impossible to negotiate a satisfactory end to the war. With Hindenburg championing the cause of the annexationists, the rivalry between the two camps began to enter the political arena in Germany.

On 20 June, Alexeyev exchanged telegrams with Cadorna in Italy to coordinate a further great blow on the Eastern Front with a renewed Italian offensive on the Isonzo. This was intercepted and passed to Conrad, who urged Linsingen to achieve a decisive success before this new Russian offensive began. Once Linsingen had dealt with the Lutsk salient, Conrad suggested, it might be possible to transfer some of his forces south to restore the situation in Seventh Army's sector. If the Russians were to advance to the Romanian border and trigger the entry of Romania into the war, it would be impossible for Austria-Hungary to defend itself against Italy and Russia and still find troops with which to oppose Romania. It was therefore essential for strong German and Austro-Hungarian forces to be sent to Galicia so that a counteroffensive could be mounted against the Russians along the Dniester valley.

Falkenhayn's response was characteristically biting, enquiring pointedly where Conrad expected to find his share of the forces for the proposed counteroffensive. Conrad had to accept that for the moment, it was impossible for him to find more than the two divisions he had already ordered to move from the Tyrol to the east, in view of the imminent Italian attack and the limited capacity of the Alpine railways:

> I therefore regret that I am unable to prepare assault forces either side of the Dniester, guard against a Russian thrust towards Hungary, and reliably hold the Italian front, even though these are all essential.[278]

The following day Conrad met Falkenhayn in Berlin. The German response was that the two divisions already en route should be used to stiffen the defences in the Carpathians and Galicia rather than being risked in a counterattack, but Conrad believed that it was questionable whether they would be sufficient to shore up the defensive line; true to his personal conviction that only offensive operations could wrest the initiative from the enemy and turn the tide, he insisted that a counteroffensive was essential. Moreover, this would require more German troops. At the time, Archduke Eugen had already agreed to release the Austro-Hungarian I Corps from the Alps, but Conrad chose not to reveal this to his German counterpart, perhaps fearing that it would reduce Falkenhayn's willingness to send more men.

The discussion continued on 23 June. Reluctantly agreeing that a counteroffensive might be required in the southern sector, Falkenhayn suggested that it would be best if it came from Bothmer's South Army attacking directly south, into the flank of the Russian advance. From the German perspective, this would also ensure that the attack was under German control. Aware of all the nuances of Falkenhayn's suggestion, Conrad insisted that the Russian advance would be far more easily disrupted by his proposed attack along the Dniester valley from the west rather than south by Bothmer, which would require the reinforcements to function as part of Pflanzer-Baltin's Seventh Army and thus come under Austro-Hungarian command. And there was the question of which was most likely to delay or prevent Romanian entry into the war. However, the fundamental question remained the same: where were the forces for either counterattack to be found? Falkenhayn still held on to the hope that he would be able to bleed the French Army to defeat at Verdun, and was also aware of the imminent attack on the Somme; originally, he had intended to launch spoiling attacks to disrupt British preparations, but the diversion of troops to the east had forced him to abandon such schemes.

Regardless, there could be no doubt that unless reinforcements were sent to the Eastern Front, there was a very real danger that Austria-Hungary might suffer further catastrophic setbacks that would knock it out of the war, particularly if Romania entered the conflict. Further German help was promised in the shape of a German infantry division for Pflanzer-Baltin's Seventh Army and another for Bothmer's South Army. The two men finally agreed to an offensive operation in Galicia, for which a new Austro-Hungarian Twelfth Army would be created, largely using what troops could be spared from the Italian front together with German reinforcements. If Conrad was pleasantly surprised by Falkenhayn's suggestion that the army should be commanded by Archduke Karl, the heir to the Habsburg throne, he was less happy about the inevitable price that he had to pay: Seeckt would switch from being chief of staff of the Austro-Hungarian Seventh Army to serve in the same role in the new army. Given Archduke Karl's limited military experience, he would rely heavily upon his chief of staff, thus ensuring that Falkenhayn retained control at a fundamental level.

Whilst *AOK* and *OHL* argued about how to deal with the consequences of failure, the Russians continued to wrestle with the problems of success. Although there had been some local activity by West Front, there was still no sign of the major offensives that had been promised; even Third Army's attack on Pinsk, scheduled for 19 June, had been postponed at the last moment. Fourth Army was being pulled out of its original positions and repositioned for West Front's attack on Baranovichi immediately north of Lesh's Third Army, but – as Brusilov had feared – there was no possibility of this attack occurring in the immediate future. He was finally able to pin down Lesh to commit to an offensive against Pinsk at the beginning of July, at which time Evert and Kuropatkin were also to launch their attacks.[279] In the meantime, the forces south of the Pripet Marshes would struggle on alone.

On 21 June, *Gruppe Falkenhayn* resumed its advance, reinforced by the newly arrived 61st Infantry Division. Advancing cautiously, the group made steady progress throughout the day; it was faced by the Russian VIII Corps, which had withdrawn a short distance. *Gruppe Szurmay* and the Austro-Hungarian X Corps also found that the Russians facing them had pulled back, and warily moved forward; towards evening, the troops of Fourth Army halted in front of the new Russian positions. Whilst Brusilov may have been interested in an advance by Kaledin's Eighth Army towards Kovel, the cautious Kaledin was still counting the cost to his troops of the opening days of Linsingen's offensive. The German advance had effectively been brought to a standstill, but the Russian infantry had paid a substantial price, and this had forced Kaledin to order a small withdrawal to a more defensible line; he had also had to commit the relatively fresh XXIII Corps to shore up the front, meaning that he had far fewer troops available with which he could launch a further advance.[280]

Kaledin's modest withdrawal came at the precise moment when Linsingen was considering how best to resume his offensive, and the German commander lost no time in urging his subordinates to pursue the retreating Russians with the utmost vigour. The slow advance of Falkenhayn's group continued the following day, and it was only on 23 June that the centre of the group, consisting of the three infantry divisions – 43rd Reserve Infantry Division to the north, 108th Infantry Division in the centre and 61st Infantry Division to the south – first encountered serious resistance. Nevertheless, by the end of the day, parts of the main line of Russian defences had been captured, but pressure on the northern wing of Puhallo's First Army – on the right flank of Falkenhayn's group – suddenly increased as Russian counterattacks developed all along the line. Most were repulsed, but the pressure was sufficient for Falkenhayn to order his infantry to dig in and await the arrival of heavy artillery. This was completely contrary to Linsingen's repeated instructions for the Russians to be pressured as hard as possible; with a determination bordering on desperation that his counteroffensive was going to succeed, he clearly believed that the Russians had been shaken and were withdrawing, not just pulling back to a stronger position. Nor was it just Falkenhayn's group that was forced to halt; attempts by Marwitz and Tersztyánsky to advance also foundered within a few hundred metres when they ran into solid Russian defences. The northern flank of the Austro-Hungarian X Corps even lost ground when the Russians mounted a counterattack late on 23 June.

It was now clear even to Linsingen that further frontal assaults on the Russian defences were not going to succeed; any ground gained would require an unacceptable price to be paid. Accordingly, he decided to concentrate his offensive effort in Falkenhayn's sector, with a thrust towards Lutsk from the southwest. In order to increase the likelihood of success, he assigned three additional divisions – the German 22nd and 108th Infantry Divisions and the *k.u.k.* 7th Infantry Division – to the new attack group, together with additional heavy artillery, much of it en route from the Alps. Marwitz was to take control of the group, with Falkenhayn as a subordinate corps commander. This must have come as a disappointment to Falkenhayn; the failure of his group to make better progress was largely due to the modest resources that had been placed at his disposal. Marwitz's former command was now assigned to Lüttwitz's German X Corps. Both these forces and those of Bernhardi continued their attacks into the last week of June, at least partially to distract Russian attention from the new attack group that was being assembled.

Formal orders for the new group were issued on 25 June. Marwitz was to commence his attack no later than 30 June, between the Austro-Hungarian First and Fourth Armies. On the right wing of *Gruppe Marwitz* would be the *k.u.k.* 7th Infantry Divisions, then the German 22nd and 108th Infantry Divisions, and finally the *k.u.k.* 48th Infantry Division, collectively under Marwitz's direct command, with *Korps Falkenhayn* – the *k.u.k.* 61st Infantry Division, and the German 43rd Reserve Division and 9th Cavalry Division – operating on the left wing. As much of the line as possible would be held by Feldmarschallleutnant Theodor von Leonhardi's cavalry corps for as long as possible with the infantry moving up behind them mainly at night. The infantry would move into position before dawn on 30 June.

Tersztyánsky's Fourth Army was to move up alongside the new *Gruppe Marwitz*, and in order to improve the chances of success, Tersztyánsky advised Linsingen and *AOK* that he would have to conserve artillery ammunition – particularly for howitzers and mortars – until the new offensive started. But even this would not be enough:

> If Fourth Army is to receive proper help, each corps must be assigned a fresh, battle-ready division of troops which, by its example, will have an invigorating effect on the current troops and will encourage a healthy rivalry.[281]

Even when he sent this telegram, Tersztyánsky must have known that such fresh, combat-ready troops were simply not available.

The Russian high command was also taking stock. Far from thrusting towards Kovel, Kaledin's Eighth Army had taken up a defensive posture, with the cautious army commander even suggesting that it might be necessary to withdraw to a shorter line if German and Austro-Hungarian pressure continued.[282] Nevertheless, with some of the promised reinforcements now arriving, Brusilov could look forward to advancing once again; there was also the likelihood that Evert and Kuropatkin would run out of excuses and would have to attack on their fronts. He therefore issued orders for Lesh's Third Army to attack towards Pinsk as planned, while Kaledin's Eighth Army was to attack towards Kovel, also as previously planned. Eleventh Army was to push forward and take Brody, while Seventh and Ninth Armies also advanced.

Kaledin was not enthusiastic about an offensive towards Kovel from the Lutsk salient, not least because the path of the offensive was blocked by German troops that had been trying to push him back. Instead, he suggested a drive towards the west against Tersztyánsky's Fourth Army with the intention of pushing towards Władimir Wołynsk. Brusilov refused and had to visit Kaledin twice, insisting that Eighth Army should maintain a defensive stance towards the west; whilst a drive to Władimir Wołynsk could potentially disrupt the defences of the Central Powers, the opportunity for such an advance was probably gone, with strong German forces assembling on either flank of the Lutsk salient. Even if Kuropatkin succeeded in reaching his objective – a distance of about 27 miles (45km) – his flanks would be very vulnerable.

Having failed to secure permission to attack Tersztyánsky, Kaledin now suggested shifting his main effort to the north, where the enemy line was held mainly by Austro-Hungarian troops, and trying to reach Kovel from the east rather than the southeast. Brusilov preferred his previous option, partly because he had seen how redeployment by Evert's West Front merely resulted in delays that the enemy might use to bring up even more reinforcements, but Kaledin remained adamant. Any attempt to attack through the German X Corps would have no chance of success.[283] Partly to focus Kaledin's mind towards the northwest and partly to rationalise the arrangements on the battlefield, Brusilov transferred the Russian VIII Corps, on the southern flank of Eighth Army, to the neighbouring

Eleventh Army. Here, the somewhat depleted divisions of VIII Corps were assigned a shorter segment of front line, allowing them to concentrate their forces in the path of the expected German offensive, with two cavalry divisions deployed as reserves.

At the southern end of the front, Lechitsky was growing increasingly concerned about the length of his front line, which had lengthened just as the front held by Pflanzer-Baltin's army had lengthened. He wrote to Brusilov, expressing his concerns:

> As my army moves forward, its rear is almost unprotected. The enemy has a well-developed system of narrow-gauge railways through the Carpathians to Bukovina. Moreover, two wide-gauge railways connect Hungary to Bukovina … The experience of 1914–15 shows that even a threat of an advance towards Hungary will initiate swift measures by the enemy high command to transfer forces … We must assume that the Austrians will not remain indifferent to our progress and will try to concentrate troops to defend Hungary from Bukovina. For our part, I feel that the three divisions I have available will be stretched along a front of more than 120 miles [190km], and will be too weak and will merely be spectators in the event of an enemy offensive. I need reserves for an active defence, and have none available … All of these issues lead me to request the transfer of an additional corps and at least one cavalry division to the army.[284]

Brusilov assigned an additional two infantry divisions to Lechitsky, and abandoned embryonic plans that had been drawn up for a cavalry raid into Hungary through the Carpathians; such operations had been suggested repeatedly through the war by all sides, with no significant success. Instead, the cavalry would be used to shore up Lechitsky's line. On 18 June, following an unexpected withdrawal of *Gruppe Benigni*, Lechitsky was able to reach and capture Kolomea; the following day, Austro-Hungarian counterattacks were beaten off without difficulty, but for the moment at least, Lechitsky was forced to halt through a combination of supply difficulties, casualties, and the length of his front line. The casualties suffered by Southwest Front in June were substantial. As had been the case the previous year when Mackensen mounted his successful offensive, the Russians found that breaking through enemy defensives was a costly business; total losses amounted to about 285,000.[285] Whilst the *k.u.k.* Army had suffered far worse casualties, these losses were still enormous, and greatly depleted the offensive capabilities of Southwest Front; the 'storm troops' that had been trained for the offensive were largely gone, and although the ranks had been replenished to a degree with replacement drafts, these – as was always the case – had only the most rudimentary level of training. They might suffice for defensive fighting, but they lacked the necessary skills for the sort of attacks that were the hallmark of the opening days of the campaign.

By the end of the month, both sides were ready to resume major operations. Linsingen issued an order to his subordinates on 29 June:

> There will be a general attack on the entire front of the army group on 30 June, which must be carried out with great vigour everywhere. The enemy must not be permitted to withdraw troops from any parts of the front![286]

At almost the same time, Alexeyev sent a telegram to the Russian military attaché in Rome, expressing similar views:

> The threatened advance of our southern armies, especially towards Kovel and Władimir Wołynsk, has forced the enemy to take energetic counter-measures. The German X Corps has been transferred to the Kovel area from the French front, and considerable Austrian forces have gathered in the area of Władimir Wołynsk and Podgaytsy [immediately to the east of Władimir Wołynsk] … The situation is favourable and requires the Italians to mount a persistent, large scale offensive. It is not merely in the interests of the Russian Army to hold Austrian forces on the Italian front, but in the overall interest of the Allies. The Italians can and should regain lost ground and tie down the Austrian Army, inflicting as large losses as possible … I authorise you to present my ideas to the [Italian] commander-in-chief and to press energetically for a vigorous attack against the enemy. It is now or never.[287]

Everyone knew that the coming weeks would be critical. The Germans were aware of the Anglo-French preparations along the Somme; artillery preparation had started on 24 June, and the German defenders waited in their bunkers for the beginning of the offensive. The plans of the Western Allies to attack on the Somme front have been criticised for lacking any operational objectives and resulting purely in the loss of hundreds of thousands of men, but this was precisely the strategy of attrition that had been agreed at Chantilly the previous winter.[288] It was conceivable that the war would be decided by the Entente Powers in the coming weeks – if there were major breakthroughs on any front, it would be impossible for the Central Powers to transfer troops from one front to another to shore up their defences.

CHAPTER 8

NOW OR NEVER

When he wrote to the Russian military attaché in Rome that it was 'now or never' for the Entente Powers to defeat their enemies, Alexeyev used a dramatic turn of phrase that was uncharacteristic for a man widely regarded as diligent and hard-working, but not given to flights of fancy. Nevertheless, his analysis had considerable merit. The month of July would see the first concerted effort by the enemies of Germany and Austria-Hungary to coordinate their attacks in a deliberate and planned manner; whilst there might be opportunities in future to repeat the exercise if it proved ineffective, Alexeyev would have known that the Russian Army – and Russian society at large – was showing signs of strain. At the very least, Russia needed a substantial victory in order to keep dissent in check.

The British and French had been bombarding the German lines on the Somme for several days, and began their assault on 1 July. The attack of the French Sixth Army on either side of the Somme was initially successful, breaking into the German positions and causing major casualties, but the British Fourth Army endured the heaviest losses ever suffered by British forces in a single day of battle; one battalion of the West Yorkshire Regiment lost over 700 men out of its establishment of about 1,000, and the total of dead, wounded and missing amounted to 57,000. German casualties for the first day, facing both the French and British, were roughly 12,000.[289] Although the German defences – particularly in the French sector – had been shaken, they remained largely intact throughout the coming weeks, with huge casualties on all sides. When the battle finally petered out in November, the British had lost nearly 420,000 men, the French another 204,000; German casualties amounted to 465,000. However, these bare numbers give an incomplete picture. Most of the British troops who were killed or wounded were the relatively new recruits of Kitchener's army, created in wartime from volunteers, whereas the German losses included a hard core of experienced men who were irreplaceable. In that respect at least, the attrition of the Central Powers that had been planned at Chantilly the previous winter was a success, though the butcher's bill has left its mark on history.

The Italians had also planned to attack in July, but the redeployment of troops to stop Eugen's offensive at Asiago forced the intended assault on the Isonzo sector – which had already been the scene of five bloody and futile attempts by the Italian Army to force a way through the Austro-Hungarian lines – to be postponed until August. Nevertheless, the *k.u.k.* Army was aware of Italian preparations, and to an extent this forced Conrad to be cautious about moving more troops to the Eastern Front.

It should be remembered that Brusilov's offensive, which pushed the *k.u.k.* Army to the brink of disaster, was originally intended as a secondary attack to complement the main offensive of Evert's West Front, and that the attack was moved forward in response to Italian requests. Despite the transfer of men and guns to Southwest Front, Evert remained in command of the main concentration of Russian forces, and continued his time-consuming preparations. The primary focus of the offensive was changed in June to the Baranovichi sector, requiring Ragosa's Fourth Army to relocate, with inevitable consequences. The artillery moved into position barely in time, with many batteries having little opportunity to 'range in' on their target areas. Huge quantities of shells had to be moved, placing additional strain on inadequate railway services; and, of course, there were the cumbersome cavalry formations, complete with huge quantities of fodder for the horses, that took up valuable space on trains and then choked the roads in the rear areas of the front line. Nor was there sufficient time for careful reconnaissance to identify all of the defensive strongpoints and lines of defence. Despite all the lessons of previous failures – and Brusilov's notable success – there was little attempt to emulate Southwest Front's close cooperation between artillery and infantry.

Some lessons had been learned, but their application was minimal. At one intended point of attack, trenches were sapped forwards by the men of IX Corps towards the enemy defences, occupied in this sector by the Austro-Hungarian 16th Infantry Division, part of XII Corps. An Austrian officer commented on the developments, which were clearly visible from his positions:

> The Russian trenches opposite our old positions in this sector, whose lines were so well-known that we could have drawn them with our eyes closed, changed considerably after our forward observation posts were withdrawn. Countless saps

> with good defensive zigzags and flanking shoulder extensions had been pushed forward from the front lines towards our trenches using every fold in the undulating terrain; the saps were interlinked, and thus the entire trench system had been extended towards our lines.[290]

It seems that this was something that only occurred in one or two specific locations; elsewhere, there were no signs of any such preparations. Given Evert's reluctance to commit to an offensive, it was not surprising that he made no attempt to oversee the measures that his subordinates were taking, and certainly showed none of the attention to detail that characterised Brusilov's approach. He appears to have been persevering with the old belief that massive artillery preparation would make the role of the infantry little more than that of marching forward to secure shattered enemy positions.

Before Evert could begin his assault, fighting flared up south of the Pripet. Following the lull in the last week of June, the first new attack in the southern sector of the Eastern Front was made by elements of Puhallo's First Army on 30 June, seizing a bridgehead across the River Styr. The Russians reacted quickly, blocking every attempt to expand the bridgehead and wrecking the pontoon bridges that were established across the river with artillery fire. It was soon all that Puhallo could to do hold the bridgehead, let alone expand it. On the same day, the heavy artillery that had been promised for Marwitz's group arrived and began its preparatory work. Unfortunately for the Germans, heavy rainstorms delayed the deployment of the guns and the arrival of sufficient ammunition, and also softened the ground, rendering the explosive shells less effective. When the troops advanced, they rapidly ran into intact Russian defences and made minimal progress while suffering substantial losses. It is notable that the Germans were also slow to learn the lessons of previous battles; whilst there may have been advantages in mounting attacks as soon as possible, this was at the price of the painstaking reconnaissance and preparation that were the hallmarks of the successes of both Mackensen and Brusilov. Overnight, Marwitz decided that Falkenhayn's corps should hold its ground while the formations on the right flank of the group continued to attack, and on 1 July this policy led to a success, with the leading elements driving back the Russian XLV Corps about 3 miles (5km).

A little to the north, Tersztyánsky's Fourth Army's task was largely to tie down the Russian defenders, but Tersztyánsky chose to order X Corps to launch energetic attacks. With its ranks still recovering from their losses of June, the divisions of Csanády's corps made almost no gains at all, suffering heavy losses as they tried to attack through the rain and across muddy ground; casualties were particularly severe amongst the ranks of their junior officers, who seem to have tried to redeem their previous failures by leading energetically from the front. At dusk on 30 June, Csanády advised Tersztyánsky that he wished to pull back much of the Austro-Hungarian 11th Infantry Division to reorganise its battalions and give them an opportunity for rest and replenishment.

The Austro-Hungarian 11th Infantry Division was indeed in poor shape. It had moved up to its attack positions on 29 June and then spent a day struggling to gain any ground and suffered serious losses in the process; during this time, a combination of muddy conditions and general lack of competence amongst the supply services resulted in the front line troops receiving almost no supplies of food, water or ammunition. The division commander, Generalmajor Rudolf Obauer, sent Csanády a report supported by his brigade commanders to the effect that the troops were simply in no state to launch further attacks. The two men agreed that the best that could be expected was to bind the opposing Russian forces, much to the anger of Tersztyánsky; Conrad had deliberately appointed him because of his outspoken attitude with the hope that he would be a useful foil to Linsingen, but it was now his subordinates who felt the full weight of his ire. The army commander insisted that no ground should be conceded and that the attacks should be resumed the following day. Csanády had no choice but to comply, restricting himself to commenting that his troops had still not recovered from the defeats of June and therefore lacked the appropriate attacking spirit. Whilst he might agree with Obauer's assessment, he was obliged to follow the orders from above. However, it is arguable that as corps commander, he might have shown more energy in sorting out the logistical deficiencies that added to the woes of 11th Infantry Division.

Across the northern part of the Lutsk salient, German and Austro-Hungarian efforts to advance met with the same limited successes as were generally seen elsewhere. The only formation to make any significant headway was the German 107th Infantry Division of *Gruppe Bernhardi*, and in an attempt to exploit this Bernhardi decided to concentrate his troops for a more focused push on 2 July. The position of this was opportune, lying due north of where *Gruppe Marwitz* had made some progress; if the two attacks could prosper, there was a real possibility of reducing the Lutsk salient. However, if this was to occur, it was vital that the line to the east and northeast of Bernhardi's sector – held by Heinrich Fath and General Leopold Freiherr von Hauer – held firm. If they were forced back, it would expose Bernhardi's eastern flank to the Russians. Linsingen had been alerted to a steady concentration of Russian troops opposite this sector, and there could be no question that an attack was coming. Accordingly, he ordered Fath and

Hauer to prepare a brigade each as reserves to help deal with the imminent onslaught. Confident that this was a sufficient precaution, he advised both Conrad and Falkenhayn that he intended to continue his efforts to try to retake Lutsk, placing particular confidence on the advance of *Gruppe Marwitz*.

Brusilov had anticipated the attacks against the northern and southern flanks of the Lutsk salient; these were the logical points for any attack by the Central Powers, and there had been plentiful reconnaissance information to confirm this. Accordingly, he ordered Sakharov to be ready to attack with the northern wing of his Eleventh Army into the eastern flank of *Gruppe Marwitz*. To this end, Sakharov moved his own reserves north, and allocated V Corps – recently assigned to Southwest Front and in turn allocated by Brusilov to Sakharov – to the coming attack. At the same time, Lesh's Third Army was to attack the lines of *Gruppe Hauer* and *Gruppe Benigni*, again to put pressure on the eastern flank of the enemy attacks on the Lutsk salient. In other words, Brusilov's response to German attempts to strike at the flanks of the Lutsk salient was to launch counter-strikes into the flanks of the German forces.

On 2 July, West Front finally launched its offensive. Four corps of Ragosa's Fourth Army had been concentrated along a narrow front to the north of Baranovichi, with three further corps in reserve to exploit any initial success. In contrast to the passivity of Austro-Hungarian forces prior to the great offensive by Southwest Front, the German and Austro-Hungarian defenders took measures to prepare for the coming attack, moving the bulk of their troops out of the first line of defences to protect them from the initial Russian bombardment. At 4 a.m., the Russians guns began to fire, a haphazard rain of shells that achieved little. There was no attempt to emulate the precise preparation by Brusilov's gunners, for a variety of reasons: the maps the Russians were using were inadequate; the positions of the defences were not reconnoitred with any precision; and the artillery showed little inclination to cooperate closely with the infantry. Moreover, whilst Ragosa's army had been moved to a new location, much of Evert's heavy artillery remained in its original locations. In mid-afternoon, the shelling moved on to deeper positions, and – alerted that an infantry attack was imminent – the defenders moved their troops back into the first line. When the Russian infantry advanced, it was met by intense fire and failed to make any impression; it was in almost every respect a replay of the disastrous attacks of March.

The following night, Ragosa tried again. There was a local success in the sector defended by the Austro-Hungarian 16th Infantry Division where the attackers – from the Russian 46th Infantry Division – broke through the defences, but it was a measure of the hastiness of Russian plans that the chain of command was complex, and it took four hours for reports of the advance to filter back to Ragosa. As a result, the defenders succeeded in getting reinforcements to the threatened area faster than the Russians and 46th Infantry Division was forced to concede most of the ground it had gained with heavy losses. As it grew light on 3 July, the Russians continued their attempts to force the second line of defences, while Abram Mikhailovich Dragomirov, commander of IX Corps which had led the assault, sent increasingly desperate requests for reinforcements. Contrary to all experience, including his own during the March fighting, Ragosa had positioned his cavalry close to the front line expecting them to exploit a swift breakthrough by his infantry, and as had been the case at Lake Naroch, the mass of horsemen and their support services made rapid movement of infantry reserves almost impossible. It took until the afternoon of 3 July for some of the thousands of infantry that had been kept back to make their way to the front line, and their massed attack finally tipped the battle in the Russians' favour, overrunning the second line of defences, though at a terrible cost.

The Austro-Hungarian XII Corps, which bore the brunt of the attack, was part of Woyrsch's eponymous army, which in turn was part of Prince Leopold's army group. Reserves were ready to deal with the sort of eventuality that had risen, and were rushed to the area. Feldmarschallleutnant Eugen von Podhoránszky, commander of the Austro-Hungarian 35th Infantry Division, was assigned to lead a counterattack with a mixed force amounting to perhaps a division, but in the face of overwhelming force he could only stop further Russian advances; every attempt to push Dragomirov's troops back ended in failure.

Whilst Dragomirov's IX Corps might have achieved some local success, there had been almost no progress anywhere else along the assault front. The defences of General Johann Ritter von Henriquez's XII Corps had been put under serious pressure, and with local reserves now fully committed, Woyrsch and Leopold had no choice but to request further help. Hindenburg's *Ober Ost* was able to send a few battalions of troops that had recently arrived at the Eastern Front as replacement drafts, but these would take days to reach the threatened sector. On the afternoon of 4 July, Ragosa threw the troops of III Caucasian Corps into the battle. There was no attempt to use the flexible groups of stormtroopers that Brusilov had pioneered; instead, the Russian infantry attacked in the same dense formations that had been in use since August 1914, and the outcome was broadly what it had always been. Thousands died in the face of intense defensive fire, and it was only in a limited area that any progress was made – and even here, a German counterattack late in the day restored the previous front line. After the huge expenditure of ammunition and the heavy losses suffered by his formations, Ragosa was unable to continue his attacks, and ordered his men to pause for reorganisation and replenishment.

The Russians tried again on 7 July, the attack preceded by a heavy artillery bombardment that included the extensive use of gas. The infantry struggled forward and died in a manner that was indistinguishable from almost every previous futile attack of the war. Wave after wave of Russian soldiers tried in vain to overcome the German and Austro-Hungarian defences; whilst the defenders lacked the strength to mount counterattacks, they were strong enough to prevent any further Russian gains at any point. The fighting continued the following day without any ground changing sides, and on 9 July Evert ordered a cessation.

So much had been expected of West Front's offensive, yet the result was exceedingly poor. The German and *k.u.k.* Armies had lost about 16,000 men; Ragosa's Fourth Army had lost 80,000 and had advanced less than 3 miles (5km). The total consumption of artillery ammunition in the assault exceeded what Brusilov's front had used in all of June.[291] After the Battle of Waterloo, the Duke of Wellington commented on the lack of innovation shown by the French and said 'They came on in the same old way and we defeated them in the same old way.' Much the same could be said for Ragosa's attack at Baranovichi. The conduct of the assault was indistinguishable from what might have occurred in 1914 or 1915 – an imprecise artillery bombardment, mass infantry attacks that struggled to make progress and lacked sufficient support to sustain any early gains, and the presence of large numbers of cavalry that failed to make any impression on the fighting and merely hindered rear area movements. The German and Austro-Hungarian countermeasures, too, were simply a repeat of what had been done in the past: concentrated defensive infantry and artillery fire, with swift counterattacks against exhausted and decimated Russian infantry to recover lost ground.

Not long after, Alfred Knox visited the sector to speak to some of those involved:

> I motored to see General Abram Dragomirov. He is small and active, and certainly 'all there'.
>
> I asked him his opinion as to the cause of failure. He said: 'You may be forgiven if you make a certain number of mistakes, but if you make nothing but mistakes you cannot succeed. We hurried on the operation while our forces were only assembling; we attacked on a narrow front of seven versts [about 4 miles, or 7km]; we distributed the attacking force parallel to the front instead of in depth; too large a proportion of the force was held back instead of being entrusted to the

> commander on the spot; the 46th Division should have been placed under the commander of the main attack.'
>
> This was not very convincing. Staev, the general quartermaster of Fourth Army, told me that Dragomirov had distributed IX and XXXV Corps parallel to the front on his own initiative, whereas Dragomirov said that the order came from above, i.e. from Staev. Perhaps if the 46th Division had been placed under Dragomirov he would have supported it, but it is not very clear why he failed to do so on his own initiative.
>
> All accounts agree that the men attacked with rare gallantry. No one is in the slightest degree depressed. IX Corps lost 55 per cent [of its strength].[292]

This account is misleading. It would have been extraordinary if no one was in the slightest degree depressed after the disastrous losses for so little gain. Dragomirov had no authority over XXXV Corps, so it is wrong to blame him for its deployment, though his failure to support a neighbouring formation on his own initiative – a degree of flexibility that was taken for granted in the armies of Germany – was a flaw that he shared with most Russian commanders of his generation. In any event, Ragosa, who told Knox his own views on why the attack had failed, should have overseen matters:

> Ragosa is an advocate of the slow system of advance against positions as strongly fortified as those of the Germans. I objected that a slow advance demanded materiel, and he replied that materiel we *must* have.
>
> He talked to me for an hour on the training in a moral sense of the Russian soldier. He said that the Russian soldier would do anything if properly led, but the officers are wanting in moral training and do not give an example to their men … He said that the Russian soldier would not stand severe discipline of the Prussian type, but he wanted officers that he could look up to and would then be ready to do all they might ask of him. Unfortunately the mass of Russian officers seemed to think that their duty began and ended with leading their men in the attack; and this, after all, was only a small part of it. They did not look after their men's comfort or give their men an example by looking after their own comfort. These are material faults.
>
> He thought that all that could be done in wartime to raise the moral level of the officers was to choose men to command carefully, and by avoiding constant transfer to give them time to *form* their subordinates. The way in which he personally had been shifted about might be taken as a compliment, as it proved he possessed the confidence of the Commander-in-Chief; but all the same it was

> hard on him and had led to no good results. Three days before the March offensive he had been transferred to take command of the Second Army, which had been selected to play the principal role. Then he was transferred to Molodechno because the main offensive was to take place from there. Then he was sent to Nesvij [i.e. in preparation for the attack towards Baranovichi] with orders to attack 'at all costs' within a fortnight. He had had no time to make proper arrangements for the attack. He had had to carry it out with an army of ten corps, only two of which he had known before. One of the corps was commanded by a man who had been already four times removed from his command in the course of the present war. How could he possibly place confidence in this man's judgement? This constant shifting of corps from one army to another had disastrous results. If he were given four corps, and given them for a year, he could make his will felt down to the humblest private and could do anything with them.
>
> There was no initiative in the Russian Army, because initiative had been systematically suppressed by the higher military authorities in peace as a dangerous and uncomfortable thing.
>
> Ragosa blamed *Stavka* for lack of a properly-thought-out plan, and for lack of character to stick to a plan, whether good or bad. He says they are too easily impressed and constantly attracted to new ventures.[293]

Whilst there may be some truth in Ragosa's criticism of Russian officers, this account too is misleading. The catastrophic performance of many senior Russian officers left *Stavka* with no choice but to replace commanders, and the pool of available talent was so poor that it was inevitable that on some occasions, individuals who had previously been dismissed were given new posts elsewhere. The exigencies of war made it impossible for armies to consist of the same corps for long periods. All of these limitations applied to Brusilov too, yet he managed to achieve a degree of success that far surpassed any of his Russian contemporaries.

Another consequence of Evert's last-minute change of emphasis from his original planned attack to the new one at Baranovichi was that it removed all possibility of coordinating his attack with that of Northern Front; both attacks were now reduced to the level of merely tying down German forces. Kuropatkin's forces launched attacks in mid-July, but the Germans had long anticipated them and had prepared accordingly. With substantial forces – and, equally importantly, artillery supplies – already transferred to Southwest Front, the attacks could not be sustained for long. After a few days of futile bloodshed, the assaults faded away. The front line had not moved at all. There were some fanciful proposals – again – to mount an amphibious operation in the Gulf of Riga to outflank the

German lines from the north, but Kuropatkin argued that any such operation could not be coordinated with the axis of his planned attack, and any amphibious operation should be planned as a self-contained attack. Rather than squander troops on such a speculative venture, Alexeyev dropped the entire proposal.[294]

On 2 July, *Gruppe Marwitz* renewed its assaults and made encouraging progress. In an attempt to halt the German and Austro-Hungarian forces, Sakharov threw whatever reserves he had available into the fight, and the Russians launched a series of counterattacks with infantry and dismounted cavalry. Sakharov also warned Brusilov and Kaledin that he might be forced to pull back his northern flank. This would have destabilised the defences of the southern part of the Lutsk salient, and Brusilov ordered Kaledin to release one infantry and one cavalry division to Sakharov. Casualties continued to mount throughout 2 July, and whilst the Russian counterattacks prevented further advances by Marwitz, the price was severe, and little or no ground was recovered. Further north, Tersztyánsky's Fourth Army succeeded in widening its front, allowing *Gruppe Falkenhayn* to release an additional infantry division for use by Marwitz. At first, Tersztyánsky continued to urge Csanády to renew his attacks with X Corps; as both Csanády and 11th Infantry Division's commander Obauer had predicted, the exhausted division was forced back to the positions it had occupied on 1 July. Linsingen now intervened, ordering Fourth Army to take up a defensive stance and to widen its front still further, allowing for additional troops to be released for *Gruppe Marwitz*. The futile attempts to attack had cost Tersztyánsky's formations severe losses; one estimate suggested that the combined strength of X Corps and Szurmay's group had diminished to 17,500 combatants, barely more than the complement of a single full-strength infantry division.[295]

With the additional infantry released by Falkenhayn, Marwitz was hopeful of making faster progress, but the Russians had also deployed more troops, namely those assigned by Brusilov from Kaledin's Eighth Army to Sakharov's Eleventh Army. These were thrown into no fewer than eleven massed counterattacks, particularly against the northern flank of *Gruppe Marwitz*. The line here was held by the Austro-Hungarian 108th Infantry Division; in contrast to some of the recent battles, there was little sign of the panic and brittleness that had led to the rapid collapse of Conrad's armies. Despite suffering heavy losses, the division succeeded in holding its positions.

On the northern side of the salient, Bernhardi attempted to make further progress on 2 July. The initial attacks were successful, gaining about 3 miles (5km). However, there was disturbing news from the northwest: the entire section of front held by *Gruppe Fath* and *Gruppe Hauer* was under heavy artillery fire, in preparation for a major Russian attack. Reluctantly, Linsingen ordered Bernhardi to pause and to release 11th Bavarian Infantry Division so that it was available as a reserve. The only part of the great counteroffensive to reduce the Lutsk salient that remained active was Marwitz's group in the south. Linsingen had to console himself with the thought that although progress might have been slow, he had prevented Kaledin from mounting any offensive towards Kovel or Lemberg. Whilst an attack towards Kovel was very much what Brusilov wanted, Kaledin had shown little enthusiasm for such an operation, and was content to use the German pressure as an excuse to adopt a defensive stance.

In Galicia and Bukovina, fighting continued throughout this period, though largely at a lower intensity than had previously been the case. Lechitsky was handicapped by his extended supply lines and the greatly increased length of front that had resulted from his advance; in addition, although he had won a substantial victory, his losses were considerable and had not been made good. Alexeyev promised troops that would be transferred from Kuropatkin's Northern Front, which remained completely passive, but it would take time for these men to arrive in the south. In the meantime, both sides launched limited attacks. The new army group under the command of Archduke Karl began to assemble, and there were other changes. A large part of *Gruppe Benigni* was used to create a new VIII Corps under the command of Feldzugmeister Viktor Scheuchenstuel, newly transferred from the Alps, but when he arrived to take up his appointment, he and his chief of staff were so shocked by what they found that they felt obliged to make an extraordinary request, as described in the official Austrian history of the war:

> They saw staff who lacked confidence, poor positions, hastily constructed wire entanglements and fought-out troops who in some cases had lost the courage and confidence to be able to hold firm against the Russians' attacks. As the majority of the newly arrived troops had already been deployed as stopgaps, Feldzugmeister Scheuchenstuel asked for his dismissal from the post allocated to him by Seventh Army. Oberst Sündermann [his chief of staff] joined him in this request. Generaloberst Pflanzer-Baltin decided to grant Feldzugmeister Benigni and his chief of staff, Oberstleutnant Max Freiherr von Pitreich, whom he regarded very highly for not being afraid of the great burden of responsibility, continuing command of their group and the reinforcements that had been brought up (44th Rifle Division and 59th Infantry Division). The reinforced *Gruppe Benigni* was now designated VIII Corps.[296]

This was surely the first time in the war that a senior commander on any side had asked to be relieved of his command as soon as he took it up. Nobody can have been surprised when Scheuchenstuel was summarily dismissed from the army; nor, given the internal machinations of the *k.u.k.* Army, can there have been much surprise when the Emperor Franz Joseph, who was a personal acquaintance, reinstated him. Korda, whose XI Corps had defended so well in the winter fighting but had been driven from Czernowitz in the summer offensive, was replaced by Feldmarschallleutnant Ferdinand von Habermann. Many of the brigades that had been thrown into the fighting as they arrived were now aligned into new or reformed divisions, and the newly created Twelfth Army, which Archduke Karl would command as well as overseeing the new *Heeresgruppe Dniester*, began to take shape, consisting of *Gruppe Hadfy*, *Gruppe Kraewel*, XIII Corps and the German 1st Reserve Division.

Zeynek, who had refused to serve alongside Seeckt as chief of staff of Seventh Army, returned to his former post at the beginning of July when Seeckt moved to take up his new assignment as Archduke Karl's chief of staff:

> I found Seventh Army Headquarters still in Bohorodczany. Without attempting any counterattacks, the army had withdrawn continuously … the situation was poor, the mood still worse. Pflanzer-Baltin expressed deep dissatisfaction with Generalleutnant von Seeckt, whose decisions had not been appropriate as he did not know the terrain in the combat area. Generalleutnant von Seeckt was very correct in handing over his office to me; he had seen that there had been exemplary order under my leadership and that my return was welcome.
>
> Sadly, it was no longer my old staff; the personnel were the same, but the mood had altered. The united, spirited centre that had been established over many months had collapsed. It was as if the earlier courteous, open, friendly mood had been blown away. This also showed in external appearances, as where before we had lived like a family, Pflanzer-Baltin now no longer joined us at meals. The men had lost faith in him, spoke unfavourably of his personality traits, and nobody in the army headquarters held back from saying challenging, unfriendly things about him. A few general staff officers already saw their future commander in the Prussian general and competed for his favour, ostentatiously wearing only the Iron Cross and turned their thoughts in that direction. All the more I valued the loyalty that the majority of my colleagues had shown; a very strong anti-Prussian mood prevailed amongst many men, and thus in the middle of war, in barely two weeks, such a united and common-minded staff had split into two camps, and the trust that had formerly existed was no longer there. I resolved to think of the welfare of the army, but also to defend fiercely the prestige of the Austro-Hungarian troops.[297]

Regardless of whether the Germans were right to insist on taking greater command of matters in the east, or whether the officers of the *k.u.k.* Army were right in resenting what seemed to them high-handed arrogance on the part of the Prussians from the north, Zeynek's views were widespread in the army, though coupled with a fatalistic acceptance of reality; it was unarguable that without German help, the armies of the Dual Monarchy performed badly. It seemed inevitable that even if the Central Powers were to emerge triumphant from the war, the true victor would be Germany, with Austria-Hungary reduced to little more than a vassal. The relationship between Zeynek and Seeckt, who as chief of staff at the new army group headquarters was Zeynek's superior, seemed to exemplify all the differences between the oddly-matched allies:

> I was constantly in conflict with General von Seeckt. I could not feel any sympathy for this man with his monocle, his mocking laughter that would suddenly turn icy; the northerner and the Austrian are separated by a great gulf … the friction with General von Seeckt about internal matters worsened: Prussian administrative officers controlled our experienced troop commanders, the Prussian artillery general Hafenstein oversaw our artillery officers.[298]

However good the initial impression Seeckt may have made on Zeynek, it was now completely subsumed by the growing resentment against all things Prussian. But whatever truth there may have been to support the view of Zeynek and others about the overbearing arrogance of German officers, it is striking that Zeynek acknowledges in his memoirs the role of poor leadership in the *k.u.k.* Army's disasters – yet, even though he was chief of staff of Seventh Army, makes no attempt to accept any blame himself. Nor does he consider where such flaws developed, and how they might have been prevented or remedied.

Archduke Karl arrived to take command of his army and army group on 5 July. The intention was for him to conduct an immediate thrust against the Russians, but Lechitsky struck first, driving in Benigni's southern flank. The result was another precipitate retreat, forcing all available troops to be thrown into the defensive line. The consequence was that there were now no forces available for Twelfth Army's planned counteroffensive, and Conrad asked Falkenhayn for an additional four infantry divisions. With his forces in France facing the combined summer offensive by the British and French along the Somme whilst still trying to bleed the French Army to death at Verdun, and aware that the Russian forces facing the Germans in their sector of the Eastern Front outnumbered his own formations, Falkenhayn was in no position to agree to such a transfer of additional reinforcements, even if he had been inclined to offer further help to Conrad. He advised his counterpart that he would simply have to use his own resources to restore the shattered morale of his formations; it was alarming how, once again, the defeated formations of Seventh Army had proved so fragile.

Conrad did what he could. It was impractical for Pflanzer-Baltin to continue to wrestle with his fragmented army over such a large landscape, and on 9 July the decision was made to divide Seventh Army into two components. The smaller part of the army, which had pulled back towards the Carpathians, remained under Pflanzer-Baltin's command, while the elements that had been driven west were organised into a new Third Army, under the command of Kövesz who had enjoyed considerable success the previous year serving under Mackensen's command both on the Eastern Front and against Serbia. It remained to be seen whether he would be able to instil sufficient resolve into the demoralised ranks of his new command. In their new diminished command, Pflanzer-Baltin and Zeynek continued to be disheartened about developments:

> In Máramaros-Sziget [where their new headquarters were located] I received bad reports of the fighting in the Tatar Pass and at the same time there were unhelpful comments from *AOK*, accusing us of erratic decisions, the dispatch of troops in the wrong direction, the division of troop formations, delays and even of submitting false reports. I was almost sick with disgust and anger and found my relations with the army group command took on an irritated air, as I wanted either a change in our situation or a clear break. I must also put down my complaints about the German liaison officer – Major [Adolf] Herrgott – with whom many people were unable to work on account of his anti-Austrian propaganda. He was actually moved and replaced by [General Karl] Graf Kirchbach.[299]

Fighting resumed in the north. On 4 July, after prolonged artillery preparation, Lesh's Third Army attacked *Korps Hauer*, which was made up of a single reservist cavalry division and the Polish Legion. With plenty of warning of the coming attack, the foremost positions had already been abandoned and the initial Russian preparations into the first proper line of defences were rapidly beaten back, but during the evening a major penetration developed at the seam between the Polish Legion and the Austro-Hungarian 53rd Infantry Division to its south, requiring the commitment of all local reserves.

The neighbouring *Korps Fath* fared far worse. Whilst Hauer's troops faced east, Fath had to hold a segment of front that faced east, but then as the line extended to the south it turned to the west as part of the Lutsk salient. Consequently, the troops in the 'corner' of the position came under pressure both from the east and the south. With their trenches badly degraded by the Russian bombardment and almost all their artillery silenced, the troops of 45th Rifle Division came under heavy attack from the Russian I Turkmenistan Corps and XXX Corps. The Russians rapidly turned the right flank of the defenders, and a hastily organised counterattack failed to make any impression. By early afternoon, Fath had no reserves left and much of his main line was in headlong retreat. It took until the afternoon to restore sufficient order to mount a short counterattack that succeeded in bringing the Russian pursuit to a halt.

The assault by Lieutenant General Andrei Medardovich Zayontchovsky's XXX Corps had opened a substantial breach between *Korps Fath* and II Corps immediately to the west. Linsingen ordered both formations to counterattack to restore the situation. Oberst Steinitz, commander of 7th Infantry Brigade, was to gather together whatever units he could – four infantry battalions and whatever debris he could recover from the collapse of Fath's line – and launch a direct attack on the Russians, while Fath and Kaiser's II Corps struck from either side. But Fath had no troops available for an attack, and Kaiser also announced that he was unable to comply with Linsingen's orders – the intention had been to use the troops of 11th Bavarian Infantry Division, but these were still partly en route, and the leading elements that had arrived were judged to be too fatigued to make much of an impression. In any event, there appeared to be an easing of the crisis towards evening when Zayontchovsky pulled his leading formations back a little. The Russians had secured a penetration, but if a decisive counterattack could be launched in the coming day, the northern flank of Linsingen's army group would remain secure, allowing pressure on the Lutsk salient to be renewed.

Inevitably, much would depend on the actions of the Russians, and they had no intention of allowing Linsingen's subordinates time to seize the initiative. Two infantry corps from Third Army struck at the seam between *Korps Fath* and *Korps Hauer* on 5 July, and although they managed to hold their positions for most of the day, the Russian superiority in numbers and artillery began to exert a decisive effect during the afternoon. The Polish Legion on Hauer's southern flank was forced out of its positions and driven west in disarray, while the neighbouring *Gruppe Küttner* was reduced to 1,300 men – less than half strength – and scattered. A battalion of Bavarian *Landsturm* hurried up in the evening to join the remnants of the Polish Legion in establishing a new line, but there was no question of this holding back any serious attack. Before dawn on 5 July, General Sergei Mikhailovich Scheidemann's I Turkmenistan Corps resumed its attack;

Fath had hoped to be able to hold up any Russian attacks until the planned counterattack by II Corps was able to relieve pressure, but this was impossible. If the Russians drove on towards the north, they would roll up the entire east-facing line of both Fath's and Hauer's troops. The Russian advance against the Polish Legion threatened a possible pincer movement that would result in the encirclement of *Gruppe Fath*, and in order to save the remnants of his command, Fath had no option but to pull back his entire line towards the west.

The Russians were widening their assault. Throughout much of 5 July, the lines of II Corps came under heavy artillery fire, and repeated Russian infantry attacks were repulsed through the day with considerable difficulty. The troops of 11th Bavarian Infantry Division had force-marched to the area under cloudless skies and were in no shape to launch the planned counterattack; instead, they were used to shore up the wavering defences. Generalleutnant Paul Ritter von Kneussl, the commander of the Bavarian division since its inception in 1915, had served with distinction as part of Mackensen's successful offensive the previous year. In March 1916, his troops fought near Verdun, achieving particular success at Béthincourt.[300] With his division now broken into separate components, he could do little personally to influence the outcome of the battle; the original intention had been to position his men where they could intervene decisively, but any such intervention would now require additional reinforcements. Linsingen had only a single infantry brigade available, and this was immediately dispatched, though it would take two days to arrive in the threatened sector. Until then, Hauer, Fath and Bernhardi would have to do the best they could.

Having put so much pressure upon the Polish Legion and 45th Rifle Division, the Russians had no intention of letting their enemies recover their balance. After an intense artillery bombardment, I Turkmenistan Corps drove 45th Rifle Division back on 6 July. The Poles, too, were forced back towards the northwest, opening a substantial gap between Hauer's and Fath's commands, offering a direct route for the Russians to advance on Kovel. Regardless of his earlier exhortations to his troops to stand firm in the face of the enemy, Linsingen had to choice but to accept that a retreat was required if *Gruppe Fath* in particular – with both its flanks turned by the Russians – was not to be destroyed. Accordingly, he ordered his men to pull back to the line of the River Stochod. It was a substantial victory for Lesh and Kaledin; since they opened their attack on the northern shoulder of the Lutsk salient on 4 July, they had driven the front line nearly 18 miles (30km) from the Styr, and had covered half the distance to Kovel. However, as was always the case, they would now have to pause while artillery and reserves were moved forward, and troops were resupplied.

From the German point of view, it was a critical moment, as Ludendorff later wrote:

> It was one of the greatest crises of the Eastern Front. There was little hope that the *k.u.k.* troops would be able to hold the unfortified Stochod line.
>
> We dared to weaken ourselves further, and Field Marshal Prince Leopold of Bavaria had to do so too. Although the Russian attacks might resume at any moment, the lines were stretched further, individual regiments were freed up in order to support the left flank of *Heeresgruppe Linsingen* northeast and east of Kovel. It was unthinkable that this should withdraw further and where we might then find ourselves. Those were extremely long days and we knew well that nobody would be able to help us if the enemy attacked us.[301]

Ludendorff was not alone in his assessment of the gravity of the situation. Linsingen informed both *OHL* and *AOK* that if he was forced to concede the line of the Stochod, he would have little option but to pull back all the way to the line of the River Bug.[302] Ludendorff's last comment was also apposite. The entire strategy of the Entente Powers – and, on a smaller scale, Brusilov's strategy too – was to create pressure upon the full breadth of the enemy front in the expectation that this would result in a decisive breakthrough at some point. Unfortunately for Brusilov, neither of the other Russian fronts seemed willing or able to maintain sustained pressure upon the Germans. At the very moment that Hauer and Fath were forced to abandon the Styr line and fall back to the Stochod, West Front was declaring that it would have to pause its attacks to regroup, and given Evert's reluctance to attack in the first place, it must have been clear to Brusilov that he would have to continue to rely only on his own front's efforts. Even modest pressure by the other fronts would have made it far harder for Ludendorff and Hindenburg in the north, and Leopold in the centre, to release forces as reinforcements for Linsingen, as Brusilov later recalled:

> The fact that Kaledin was not in a position to do in the second half of June [early July, modern calendar] what he could have done in May or early June, when there were almost no troops in front of Kovel, was because the enemy managed to divert troops from those facing our Northern and West Fronts, as well as the French front, due to the inactivity of my neighbours.
>
> … If we had had a powerful supreme commander and all commanders acted on his orders … we could have pushed forward and the enemy's strategic position would have been so severe that, even without prolonged fighting, he would have

> had to retreat towards his borders and the course of the war would have taken a completely different turn, and its end would have been greatly accelerated. Now, however, we had to struggle alone against an enemy who grew gradually stronger. I carefully moved reinforcements from inactive sectors of the front, but the enemy did not sleep and since he was able to redeploy troops more rapidly, their numbers increased significantly faster than my own, and in spite of the great loss of prisoners, killed, and wounded, the enemy forces became much more powerful than my front.[303]

This last statement might have been an exaggeration, but Brusilov can be forgiven for feeling that his armies were struggling against the entire weight of the enemy's resources. More German troops – 121st Infantry Division and an independent infantry brigade – were ordered to move from the Verdun front to the east. The trickle of forces to the threatened sector, both from other parts of the Eastern Front and from the distant Western Front, sufficed to prevent a complete collapse.

With varying degrees of success, the formations of Hauer's and Fath's corps pulled back to their new positions, leaving a trail of dead and wounded behind them. Many guns had to be abandoned, together with substantial quantities of stores and ammunition. The Polish Legion suffered particularly badly, with orders for the general withdrawal reaching it late in the day and leaving it to face greatly superior Russian forces before it withdrew to the west, more out of necessity than in compliance with Linsingen's orders. By the end of 7 July, the troops were in position along the Stochod, and the strength of the Russian pursuit had ebbed. On 9 July, Lesh made an attempt to secure a crossing over the river; Fath had scraped together a force amounting to perhaps an infantry regiment and immediately committed these men to a counterattack. The Russians were thrown back to the east bank with heavy losses, and the bridges that they had begun to repair over the river were destroyed. Similarly, an attempt by Scheidemann's I Turkmenistan Corps to cross the Stochod further south also ended in failure with several thousand casualties.

Dmitri Oskin was a peasant from Tula, who had been in the front line for over a year. He was rapidly promoted to command of a platoon and later a company, and described the intensity of the fighting of July 1916:

> [We are] right on top of the Austrian trenches. Scattered machine-gun fire [is] whizzing all around, shells falling like hailstones. We dive for cover. My soldiers are losing their nerve. Some are trying to retreat. I have to threaten a few flinching cowards with my gun. After about an hour, the shooting subsides. Seizing our

> chance, we race towards the barbed wire at full tilt. Luckily, there are some holes in it.
>
> During the night of 13 July we receive the order to advance again. Bloody idiots. The Austrians will have reinforced their positions by now.
>
> This time we met fierce resistance. For the first time in this whole war, there was a bayonet fight in our trenches. The Austrians fought tenaciously. Our soldiers, too, attacked the Austrians in a frenzy until they retreated into the forest, where it wasn't so easy for us to use our bayonets. The battle became so vicious that our soldiers started using spades to split Austrians' skulls. Only nightfall stopped the butchery.
>
> At dawn, seeing no movement from the Austrian side, we began to survey the forest cautiously. A horrific scene emerged before our eyes: piles of Russian corpses in front of our trenches, and just as many Austrian dead behind them.[304]

Both sides had suffered serious losses in the fighting between the Styr and Stochod. Fath's corps had started the battle with over 34,000 rifles, but only 16,000 remained by the time it took up its positions along the Stochod. Losses amongst the Russian forces were also high, with casualties for the entire Southwest Front in the first two weeks of July estimated at over 60,000 dead and 370,000 wounded.[305] Whilst both sides realised the importance of the Stochod line, Brusilov had to accept reality: the attempts to secure crossings in the wake of the retreat of Fath and Hauer had failed with heavy losses, and there would have to be a pause while preparations were made for a deliberate assault. Accordingly, Alexeyev and Brusilov attempted to reorganise the Russian forces in preparation. There was no longer any question of the main effort of the Russian Army being made by Evert's West Front; the baton was passed decisively to Brusilov, with instructions to press on to and beyond Kovel, with the intention of turning the southern flank of the German positions that had proved so obdurate in the north. Ragosa's Fourth Army, which had failed so spectacularly at Baranovichi, was broken up and its troops dispersed to the Second and Tenth Armies; Ragosa and his staff were kept together, and would ultimately lead a new Fourth Army in Romania. The Guards Army, languishing in reserve for much of the year – most recently, in the Polotsk area out of concerns that the Germans might attempt to advance in this region – was to be inserted into the front line between Lesh's Third Army and Kaledin's Eighth Army. In addition, Lesh received two infantry corps from Evert's West Front. On paper, this meant that the Russians had a better than 2:1 superiority on the front line east of Kovel. The total strength of Southwest Front was now over 700,000 men, against about 421,000 soldiers of the Central Powers. Whilst numbers were no guarantee of success, Alexeyev could consider that he had done enough to give Brusilov the forces to launch a decisive attack that would complete the destruction of the *k.u.k.* Army and would hasten the victory of the Entente. Brusilov ordered his forces to storm the Stochod line and push on to Kovel on 15 July; however, delays in the arrival of Bezobrazov's Guards Army forced a postponement of five days.

Vladimir Mikhailovich Bezobrazov reached Brusilov's headquarters on 17 July, two days after his army was meant to have led the charge towards Kovel. After their heavy losses in 1915, the divisions of the Russian Guards had been given an extended opportunity to replenish their ranks and retrain, with the result that as a fighting force, they were perhaps one of the best formations on the entire Eastern Front, and it was a particular tragedy that their command was entrusted to someone as inappropriate as Bezobrazov. Whilst his junior officers in 1915 dismissed him as 'a ruin, with the dull gaze of a gourmand, hardly able to drag his log-like legs around',[306] Tsar Nicholas not only agreed with him that the Guards should be led by a man of high birth, but also that Bezobrazov was the very person for the job. To make matters worse – again, entirely in keeping with the worst traditions of the Russian military system – Bezobrazov's use of his personal relationship with the tsar as an opportunity to have personal favourites and supporters appointed to positions of command within the Guards Army has already been described. Brusilov's summary descriptions of the commanders of I and II Guards Corps are pithy and accurate:

> Grand Duke Pavel Alexandrovich, Commander of I Guards Corps, was a noble man, certainly very brave personally, but with no military understanding at all, and the commander of II Guards Corps [Lieutenant General Georg Ottonovich] Rauch, was intelligent and knowledgeable but had a huge disadvantage as a soldier in that his nerves simply could not endure gunfire and being in danger, and he lost all presence of mind and was unable to issue orders.[307]

Like so many of the conservative generals clustered around the tsar, Rauch was the son of a Russian nobleman with Baltic German ancestry; his father was a senior officer who won acclaim during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78. It was inevitable that he would enter the army, but he succeeded in rising to high rank without ever commanding troops in combat. He served in Rennenkampf's First Army during the invasion of East Prussia in 1914, but as a cavalry officer he spent most of his time languishing in rear areas. Consequently, despite Russia being at war for nearly two years by the time his II Guards Corps reached the front line, he still had very little combat experience – yet he was in command of some of the best soldiers in the Russian Army. To make matters worse, Bezobrazov, Duke Pavel Alexandrovich and Rauch were the men who had been responsible for the prolonged training programme to which the Guards Army had been subjected for so much of 1916. None of the lessons learned and promulgated by Shcherbachev at the beginning of 1916, and certainly none of Brusilov's innovations, played any part in the training programme; instead, the Guards were prepared in much the same manner that would have been the case in the years immediately before the war. They were therefore just as ill prepared for the realities of First World War fighting as all armies had been in August 1914.

Brusilov's original intention had been to attack on 15 July, but this was put back to 20 July, when heavy rain and delays in bringing forward artillery ammunition forced a further postponement. After visiting the sector of front assigned to his army, Bezobrazov recommended that the planned attack be moved to a slightly different position to avoid advancing over swampy ground. Brusilov agreed, and issued fresh orders for all armies on 19 July; Bezobrazov advised him that he hoped the Guards Army would be in position by 23 July. In the meantime, the armies of Southwest Front were to conserve their strength, with the exception of Sakharov's Eleventh Army.

For the Germans, it seemed as if the crisis might be over. At first, aerial reconnaissance showed few signs of troop movements on the scale that might be expected before a major resumption of offensive operations, and the pause in high-intensity fighting allowed Fath and Hauer to restore order to their battered formations. In response to a direct enquiry from Linsingen's headquarters, Tersztyánsky responded that there were no signs of a resumption of major Russian attacks against his front; Puhallo agreed, but added the warning that he expected a Russian attack sooner or later to be directed at Brody, and thence towards Lemberg. While the Russian forces along the Stochod prepared themselves for a resumption of their assault towards Kovel, Brusilov turned his attention to the stretch of front line between the Lutsk salient and Galicia. Marwitz's group had been forced to pause to reorganise before resuming its attacks, and on 7 July, the predominantly German force tried again, making only modest headway. To make matters worse, the growing crisis between the Styr and Stochod forced Linsingen to transfer forces to the north, and Marwitz was accordingly ordered to cease attacks for the moment; the German 108th Infantry Division was pulled out of the battle-line and sent north to provide much-needed reinforcements, followed a day later by the German 9th Cavalry Division.

The first new area of fighting was around Koropiec, where the Russian XVI Corps, part of Shcherbachev's Seventh Army, attempted to force the positions of the South Army. Fighting raged on 12 and 13 July, with heavy losses on the Russian side. As the battle petered out, the front line remained largely unchanged. Further north, Sakharov received welcome reinforcements in the form of V Corps and V Siberian Corps, with which he replaced XLV Corps, which had been heavily involved in trying to stop Marwitz's drive. At first light on 16 July, V Siberian Corps struck with almost its full weight against the Austro-Hungarian 61st Infantry Division. After repeated heavy losses, the division had been partly brought up to strength with drafts of Hungarian *Landsturm*, and these reservists proved as brittle as so many other Austro-Hungarian formations in the summer of 1916, and it can have come as little surprise to any German or *k.u.k.* personnel that Sakharov had chosen an Austro-Hungarian sector for his attack. The Russians made rapid progress towards the south, advancing 6 miles (10km) during the morning before they were brought to a halt. The German 108th Division, recently withdrawn from Marwitz's command and sent north, was turned around and dispatched as reinforcements, and Linsingen ordered the Austro-Hungarian First and Fourth Armies to concentrate forces so that they could help support Marwitz's sector. Fighting continued through the afternoon, and as darkness fell *Gruppe Marwitz* withdrew behind the River Lipa, blowing the bridges. In a single day, most of the ground that had been gained in the costly drive towards Lutsk had been lost.

The following day, the Russian VIII Corps attempted to force the new line where *Gruppe Leonhardi* linked up with the neighbouring Fourth Army; the attack was beaten off with substantial losses on both sides. As the day progressed, the first elements of the German 108th Infantry Division began to arrive to support Leonhardi's cavalry, and it seemed as if once more the Russian threat had been contained. However, Puhallo remained concerned that his troops to the north and northeast of Brody remained exposed, and requested permission to pull back to what he regarded as a safer line. Conrad was against this, arguing in a telephone call on 19 July that this would destabilise the entire line. Puhallo replied that the two divisions on his northern wing were opposed by at least six Russian infantry divisions and two cavalry divisions, and that there were clear signs that the enemy was preparing further assaults. Conrad was adamant, and Puhallo's troops remained in their positions.[308]

Puhallo's fears about the point at which his line turned from running north–south and angled along the Lipa to the west were confirmed in the following days. The attack that pushed the front line back to the Lipa exposed the northern flank of troops further south, and it was almost inevitable that Sakharov would turn his attention to them. Early on 20 July, the positions of the Austro-Hungarian 46th Rifle Division, deployed in the very angle of the line to the northeast of

Brody, came under heavy artillery fire and the Russians made several attempts to cross the river that formed the main line of defence, first under cover of darkness and then at first light. All of them were beaten off with heavy losses, and the *k.u.k.* artillery inflicted additional substantial casualties when it bombarded the Russian assembly areas to the east of the river. A similar attack against the division's southern flank was repulsed at midday, but later that afternoon the Russians succeeded in securing crossings opposite the centre of 46th Rifle Division. Immediately, the attackers – from XXXII Corps – threw improvised bridges over the Styr and pressed forward in strength. Counterattacks succeeded in stopping the Russian advance, but could not restore the former front line. Immediately to the north, the Russian V Corps secured crossings over the Lipa the following day and threatened to turn the northern flank of 46th Rifle Division. Puhallo reluctantly gave orders for the entire northern wing of his army to pull back a short distance, a decision that caused alarm in Linsingen's headquarters in Kovel and at *AOK*. Marwitz was ordered to release troops to help shore up the wavering First Army, while Conrad attempted to locate additional reinforcements. He decided to transfer part of 33rd Infantry Division from its positions near Brody to Puhallo's army, but this risked creating weaknesses further south. The huge casualties suffered in the previous month were now forcing Conrad to take ever-greater risks to hold his line together. However, it would take time for these forces to reach Puhallo, and his retreating northern wing pulled back under continuous attack by the Russian V and XXXII Corps. Casualties were inevitably heavy; 46th Rifle Division, which had started the fighting substantially over its establishment strength as a consequence of having additional battalions attached to it, had lost 10,000 men out of nearly 23,000 in just two days.[309]

With First Army reduced considerably through a mixture of transfers to other commands and casualties, Conrad and Linsingen decided that a rearrangement was necessary. Puhallo's command was dissolved, with its troops divided between Böhm-Ermolli's Second Army to the south and Marwitz's army group to the north. Paul Puhallo was sent on leave, but without receiving any clear information on his future. He waited patiently to learn what his next assignment would be, but having heard nothing he contacted Generaloberst Arthur von Bolfras, chief of the military chancellery, in November 1916 to request a new field command. Bolfras contacted *AOK*, and received a response that must have come as a shock to Puhallo:

> During the course of events, the former First Army was dissolved as an expedient measure and then divided between neighbouring armies, and its headquarters

> thus became superfluous and was disbanded. The passive leadership and lack of initiative on the part of Generaloberst Paul Puhallo contributed to this in no small part … [and consequently] *AOK* can no longer find the necessary confidence in Generaloberst Puhallo's leadership of an army in order to be able to submit his application for re-employment as an army commander with confidence to His Majesty … *AOK* will no longer consider his re-employment as an army commander.[310]

This was surely an unjust summary. If Puhallo was guilty of showing insufficient initiative, precisely the same criticism applied to Böhm-Ermolli and Pflanzer-Baltin. His army was required to give up much of its strength to reinforce other sectors, and it is difficult to identify any specific occasions when his passivity led to any significant setback. Perhaps as belated compensation for the unfairness, he was awarded the Grand Cross of the Order of Leopold in April 1917 and elevated to the nobility, but he retired from the army a few weeks later. He returned to his Croatian home, but after the end of the war was left impoverished and moved to Vienna, where he struggled to survive on an inadequate pension. He was reliant upon financial support from former comrades until his death in 1926; his funeral in Linz was paid for by other retired officers.

In the southern part of the former First Army's sector, a Russian attack towards Mylnica was repulsed with heavy losses, but it was clear that Russian attention was slowly moving south along the line. Sakharov lacked the resources to launch the sorts of assaults that had been so successful in early June, but he was able to use the limited gains of each attack to lever back the next section of the front line. Böhm-Ermolli did not have sufficient troops in his Second Army to do other than move modest numbers of men to reinforce his northern flank when wireless intercepts confirmed a coming attack. However, with First Army's positions stabilising, he was able to have 33rd Infantry Division returned to his command, though this proved temporary; no sooner had the troops arrived than they were withdrawn again. The justification for this was that the Russians were estimated to have roughly the same number of men facing Böhm-Ermolli as Second Army had, and it was therefore unlikely that any attack could succeed. This assessment proved to be incorrect on two points. Firstly, Sakharov had rather more forces available to him than *AOK* believed; and secondly, he had the advantage of the attacker in that he could concentrate his forces where he chose. By moving V Siberian Corps and XXXII, XLV and XVII Corps with additional forces to face just the northern part of Second Army, he created a considerable advantage. He intended to unleash this new attack once the assault towards

Kovel had begun, thus preventing the Central Powers from switching forces from one sector to another.

In Teschen, Conrad continued to hope for an early counteroffensive along the Dniester. There was increasing evidence from intelligence sources that Romania was approaching the point where it would declare war on the Central Powers, and Conrad felt that the only way to postpone this was to launch an early, successful operation close to the Romanian border. Whilst Lechitsky had been unable to mount further attacks on the scale of June, his troops were now perilously close to the Carpathian passes that led to Hungary, and it was important to drive them back in order to prevent Russian troops from bursting into the heartland of the Dual Monarchy. On 18 July, he travelled to Berlin for further discussions with Falkenhayn, intending to urge his German counterpart to provide sufficient troops to make such an operation possible. Instead, Falkenhayn used the meeting to raise once more the question of overall command on the Eastern Front, suggesting again that Hindenburg should take charge of all forces as far as the Dniester. The background to this was that Falkenhayn had already suggested that Linsingen's army group should become part of Hindenburg's overall command, but Conrad had rejected this on the grounds that the natural boundary for the Eastern Front was the swampy region of the Pripet Marshes, and as Linsingen was more concerned with events south of the marshes than to the north, he should remain within the unified command of troops in the southern half of the front. Hindenburg and Ludendorff had also been involved in discussions with Falkenhayn at the end of June, and had suggested more than just a unified command on the Eastern Front:

> We certainly agreed with a unified higher command and emphasised further the need for greater mixing of *k.u.k.* and German formations. In addition, Austro-Hungarian troops could be positioned on the quieter sectors of the front of *Ober Ost*. We placed the greatest importance on the need for the training of the *k.u.k.* Army, above all the infantry, to embrace modern principles.[311]

For the moment, Falkenhayn had enough difficulty in getting Austro-Hungarian assent for unified command, let alone the other suggestions of *Ober Ost*, but on this occasion, he and Conrad were able to reach a tentative agreement: Hindenburg would oversee the forces of Linsingen, Böhm-Ermolli and Bothmer. In keeping with the arrangements for 1915 with regard to Mackensen's role on the Eastern Front, Hindenburg would be subordinated to *AOK* in his new role, but any instructions given to him by *AOK* would have to be approved first by *OHL*.[312]

With regard to the situation in Bukovina, Falkenhayn promised that he would establish a new *Karpatenkorps* around the reinforced 2nd Jäger Brigade of the *Alpenkorps*; under the command of Generalleutnant Richard von Conta, who had commanded the German 1st Infantry Division with distinction at the beginning of the war, the reinforcements would start arriving to defend the Carpathians within days. In addition, 1st Reserve Infantry Division and assorted *Landsturm* would be sent to Galicia, and Conrad agreed to transfer another infantry division from the Isonzo front to the east.

In previous exchanges between the two chiefs of staff, Conrad had frequently irritated Falkenhayn by appearing to agree to something in personal discussions, and then withdrawing his agreement in a subsequent written exchange. On this occasion, he did so in a further meeting on 26 June. Cramon, the German liaison officer at *AOK*, explained Conrad's reasoning:

> With all due respect to Hindenburg, his appointment would be regarded by the *k.u.k.* Army as very paternalistic and instead of the hoped-for enthusiasm, would generate mistrust and dismay. Above all, the Slav nationalities would oppose it and would renew their belief with greater intensity that the entire war was one between the Slav peoples and the German peoples. It caused him [Conrad] great personal sadness but as chief of staff of the army he was obliged to act firmly in the interests of the prestige of the crown, the army and the army high command.
>
> This exchange strongly characterised the delicacy of the issue of unified command. Instead of being able to deal with such an important question with clarity and openness, one ventured into partial solutions. The appointment of Hindenburg would to an extent have sidelined *AOK* in Teschen … [which] would have been left with only an advisory role for the Eastern Front; the execution of all proposals would have rested with Hindenburg. It is open to question whether Conrad asked his monarch to reject this proposal.[313]

Cramon speculated further about the reasons for the reluctance of Austria-Hungary to accept the German proposals. There were clear fears that if Germany assumed an ever more dominant position in command arrangements, this would ultimately be reflected in any post-war settlement, with the bulk of the spoils of war going to Berlin. There were also concerns in Vienna about Germany's reluctance to declare war on Italy and Romania. The Austro-Hungarian Empire might find itself facing wars against two southern neighbours without the support of Germany, and if Austro-Hungarian troops were subjected to increasing German control, it might prove impossible for Conrad to mount operations against Italy and Romania. Since the failure on the Marne in 1914, there had been occasional rumours that Germany might seek to make a separate peace with Russia, leaving the Dual Monarchy encircled by foes. Given the refusal of Russia even to consider negotiations with the Germans in 1915, the last issue was surely the most fanciful, but it is a sign of the mood in Vienna that such considerations arose at all. Living in a world that was a mixture of self-delusion and pessimism about the future, Austrian officials repeatedly drew the worst possible conclusions about events.

Behind this suspicion between the two allies, other factors were also at work. Both chiefs of staff were coming under increasing criticism in their respective capital cities, and there were increasingly loud voices calling for their dismissal. The Hungarian parliament was the scene of particularly outspoken disapproval. Gyula Andrássy, a former Hungarian minister of the interior, and Stephan Burián, the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister, were especially vocal proponents of the appointment of Hindenburg and repeatedly questioned Conrad's responsibility for the dismal performance of the *k.u.k.* Army. As a result of the disasters suffered by Fourth and Seventh Armies, Emperor Franz Joseph sent a personal aide, Feldmarschallleutnant Ferdinand Ritter von Marterer, to Teschen to compile a confidential report, as has already been described. Shortly afterwards, the senior officer on the Italian front, Generaloberst Svetovar von Boroević, and the commander in Bosnia, General von Sarkotić, were both asked whether they would be prepared to take up the post of chief of the general staff should it become vacant.[314] For the moment, though, Conrad remained in office.

In a similar manner, concerns were expressed openly in Berlin about Falkenhayn. The fighting at Verdun little sign of success, and – much as had been the case in 1914 – there was concern that there was no alternative strategy in the event of failure. For the moment, Kaiser Wilhelm remained resistant to calls for the dismissal of Falkenhayn, but there was growing pressure for greater use to be made of Hindenburg, widely regarded as the man who had saved East Prussia in 1914 and had largely been sidelined for over a year. Whilst the feud between Hindenburg and his supporters at *Ober Ost* on the one hand, and Falkenhayn's camp on the other, had been relatively quiet for several months, there remained little love lost between the two sides, and Falkenhayn must have been dismayed by increasing pressure, particularly from those on the right wing of German politics, for Hindenburg not only to take control of the Eastern Front, but also to replace Falkenhayn as chief of the general staff.[315] Some of the proposals for Hindenburg to assume a greater role on the Eastern Front should therefore be interpreted as attempts by Falkenhayn to keep his rival away from *OHL*.

Consequently, despite their mutual antipathy, Conrad and Falkenhayn found themselves in many respects dependent upon the survival of the other to resist calls for their own dismissal.

Despite the concentration of attention on command arrangements, Ludendorff was right to point out that there were fundamental training and doctrinal issues in the *k.u.k.* Army that had played a major part in the recent disasters:

> The Austro-Hungarian Army had arranged its replacement system in a manner that each infantry regiment … received a so-called 'march battalion' made up of replacement drafts at specified intervals. These battalions were deployed as combat battalions of the regiment. Some regiments that had suffered no losses often contained five to six battalions instead of [the establishment] three, while others fell to very low strengths. This was a consequence of the many nationalities of the *k.u.k.* Army and caused great difficulties … it was open to question whether the training of the infantry march battalions was adequate or not. They formed a large proportion of those taken prisoner. We needed to be involved in the training of these battalions. And so we did. In doing so, we found good and useful soldiers; the officers of the *k.u.k.* Army on the other hand were weak and not inculcated with the strong sense of duty that can be found amongst us German officers.[316]

This last comment was certainly true for the officers with which Germany went to war in 1914, but as the war progressed the need for replacements resulted in large numbers of men being trained as officers without the time to develop the traditional Prussian-inspired principles of service and duty. Even within the German Army, the quality of officers was not as high as it had been, and there were small but clear signs that this was resulting in alienation between officers and their troops.

On 28 July, there was a further meeting involving Conrad and Archduke Frederick, the nominal commander of the *k.u.k.* Army, and Hindenburg; perhaps aware that Hindenburg was about to be given a role that would at least keep him away from *OHL*, Falkenhayn declined to attend, citing illness. Finally, agreement was reached, broadly along the lines that had been proposed a few days earlier. Hindenburg would take command of the front as far south as the boundary between the Austro-Hungarian Second Army. Everything to the south of this point would fall within the control of *Heeresgruppe Erzherzog Thronfolger* ['Army Group Archduke Heir Apparent'], headed by Archduke Karl. Here, the chain of command above the archduke led directly to Conrad's *AOK*, but there was a requirement for decisions to be agreed with *OHL*, and in any event the real power in the Austro-Hungarian Twelfth Army, part of Archduke Karl's army group, was centred on the German chief of staff Seeckt and a selection of German staff officers. As will be described later, further setbacks on the Eastern Front – particularly the fall of Brody – had finally convinced Vienna that change was vital. In the north, Eichhorn was given control of his own Tenth Army, *Heeresgruppe Scholtz*, and Eighth Army, while Twelfth Army now came under the control of Prince Leopold's army group.

The failure of Alexeyev's original plan – for West Front to mount the year's main offensive, with Northern and Southwest Fronts playing subsidiary roles – combined with the unexpected success of Brusilov's offensive had forced a substantial pause in high-tempo operations while Russian forces redeployed from north of the Pripet Marshes to Southwest Front. As the last week of July began, these men were ready to launch what would decide the course of the campaign, and possibly the war. If Brusilov's successes of June could be repeated, the Russians would advance swiftly to Kovel and beyond, and as Linsingen had warned, the Germans to the north would have little option but to withdraw. All would hang on the outcome of the coming assault on the Stochod line.

CHAPTER 9

KOVEL AND STANISLAU

The central sector of the Eastern Front was dominated by the Pripet Marshes, widely regarded as totally unsuitable terrain for warfare. Even by the standards of Eastern Europe, the road network of European Russia was poor; in the Pripet region, it was even worse. There were few metalled roads, and the rest rapidly degenerated if the weather turned wet. The network of rivers with wide areas of adjoining swamp made it almost impossible to conduct major troop movements away from the roads, and in any event there were no major objectives within reach. Most of the area lay in Russian hands, and as they looked west, the Russians could see that the city of Pinsk lay at the end of what amounted to a peninsula of firm ground pointing towards the heart of the marshes. If they could take Pinsk, the Russian Third Army could expect fairly firm ground extending towards the west.

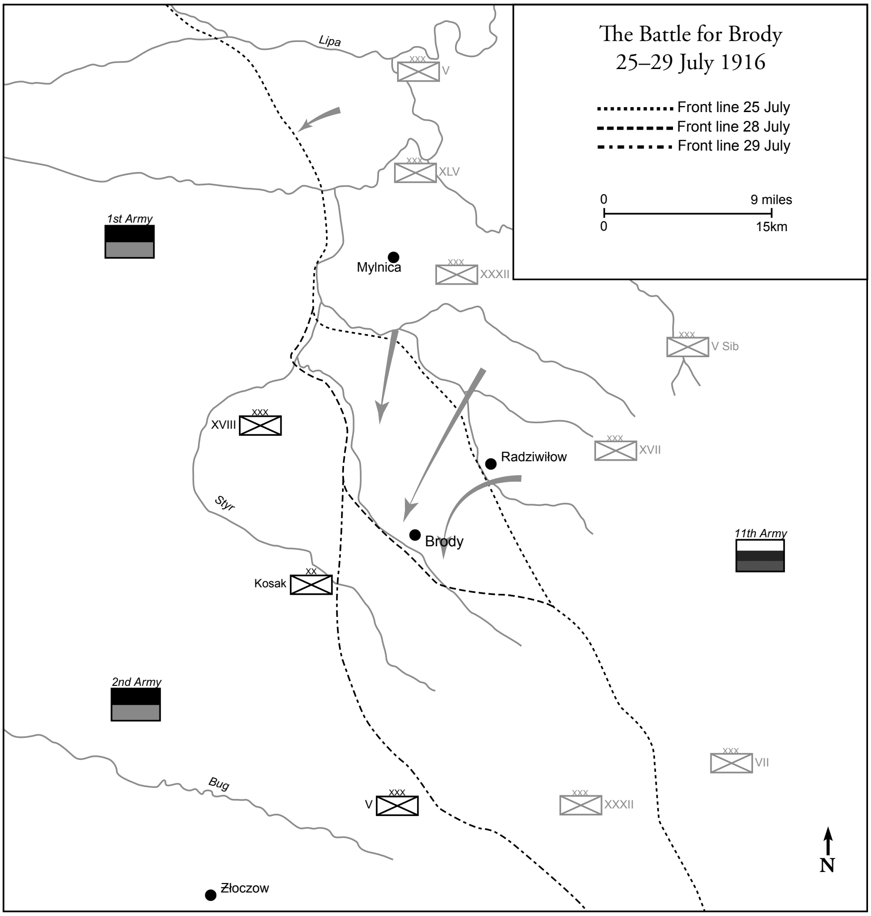
The southwest part of the Pripet Marshes extended towards, but not as far as, Kovel. The original plan for Bezobrazov's Guards Army had called for an attack towards Kovel from a point northeast of the city, but this would have necessitated an advance through the tongue of swampy ground extending southwest from the Pripet Marshes. Instead, Bezobrazov had requested successfully that his army should attack from west of Kovel, directly towards the city. Whilst this forced a further delay in operations, it was not without benefit. With the Guards Army moved somewhat further to the south, Kaledin's Eighth Army was able to concentrate in a narrower segment of front, from where it would strike northwest towards Kovel and – with lesser emphasis – west towards Władimir Wołynsk. In 1915, there had come a point during Mackensen's advance when geographic and other factors effectively dictated that the retreating Russian forces fell back on diverging axes, with Southwest Front pulling back due east while the rest of the army retreated to the northeast; in a similar manner, a Russian breakthrough at

Kovel and Władimir Wołynsk would force the armies of the Central Powers to diverge.

Bezobrazov had received additional reinforcements. In addition to the Russian Guards, he was assigned I and XXX Corps, and V Cavalry Corps. As the Guards were now outnumbered by other formations, the army was assigned a new title. Every new army that had been created since the beginning of the war had been assigned a new number, one higher than the previously assigned numbers, so logically this rule should have turned the Guards Army into Thirteenth Army, but instead it was labelled Special Army. It is unlikely that this was due to any superstition – the relatively widespread western superstition about the number thirteen has never really prevailed in Russia – and was more probably due to unwillingness to have a force that contained the entire Russian Guards given such a low-ranking number; the name that was chosen recognised the 'special' status of at least some of the troops within the army.

Brusilov was aware of the importance of Pinsk, but concluding that the Germans too would anticipate an attack on the city, ordered Lesh to strike from southeast of Pinsk into the area to the west. This would require an advance across the swampy area that extended towards Kovel, but it served two purposes. The troops of Third Army would bypass the main German defences around Pinsk and threaten the town from the rear, and would also be available to provide support for the main attack on Kovel if required. However, they would first have to overcome the enemy defences and break out of the swampy region before they could exploit either of these two possibilities. Kaledin's Eighth Army would aid Bezobrazov in attacking towards Kovel, while Sakharov's Eleventh Army was to capture Brody and then advance west towards Lemberg.[317] However, just a short while later, Brusilov issued revised instructions. In view of the losses that it had already suffered, Sakharov's army was to do the best it could to pin down enemy forces to prevent their redeployment; it was no longer necessarily expected to capture Brody, let alone threaten Lemberg.[318]

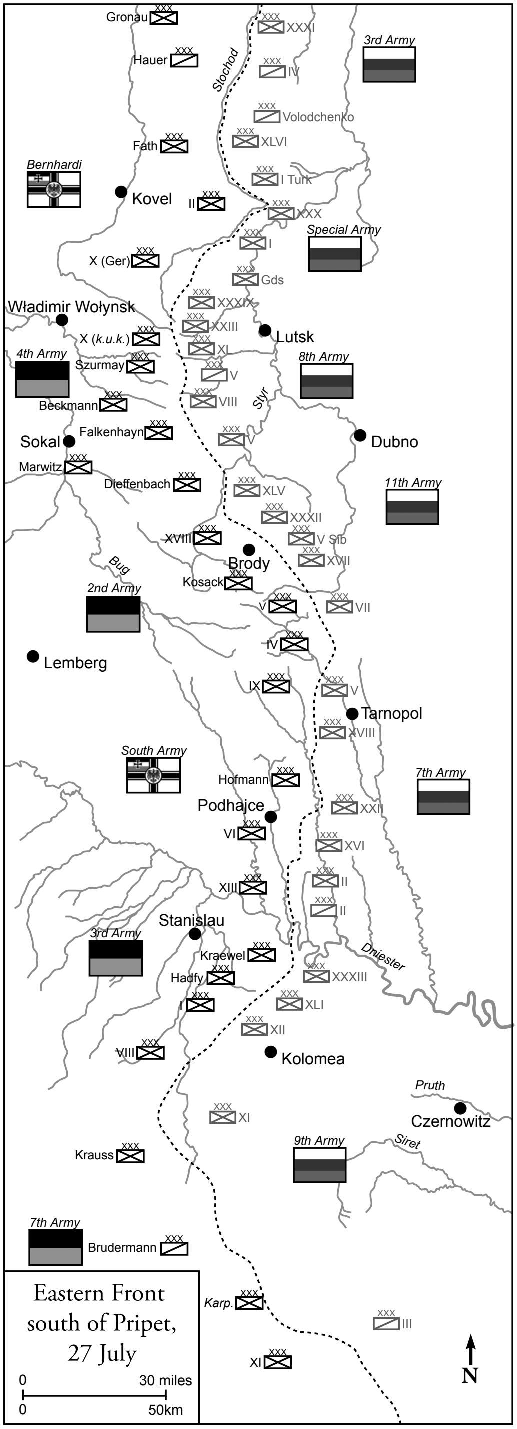
These were ambitious plans, and the character of the armies of Southwest Front had changed considerably since the successes of June. The large numbers of replacement troops that had joined the army during the preceding winter as a result of War Minister Polivanov's activities had undergone long and detailed training, converting them from reluctant soldiers into the best troops that Russia had yet deployed; they had adopted all of Brusilov's new theories with enthusiasm and intelligence, with stunning results. However, as had been the case for Mackensen's forces during 1915, casualties amongst the attackers had been high, and many of the *Polivanovtsy* were now dead or wounded; Brusilov's armies had


The Battle for Brody
25–29 July 1916
Front line 25 July
Front line 28 July
Front line 29 July
0
9 miles
0
15km
Lipa
V
XLV
XXXII
V Sib
XVII
VII
XXXII
V
1st Army
2nd Army
11th Army
Mylnica
Radziwiłow
Brody
XVIII
Styr
Kosak
Bug
Złoczow
N

lost nearly half a million men killed, wounded or missing.[319] Their replacements were either new drafts, with all the problems of poor preparation that every nation in the war encountered, or formations that had been transferred from Northern and West Fronts, and therefore had little time to learn Brusilov's new techniques. As a result, the coming operation would take the form of a more traditional assault. With a combined force of 250,000 men, including all the Russian Guards, and opposed by only 115,000 German and Austro-Hungarian troops, the odds were considerably in favour of the Russians, particularly as they could choose where they concentrated their forces. Nevertheless, given the dominance of defence in the war to date, success was not a certainty, and the attack would have to be managed with care.

On 23 July, reconnaissance flights from Böhm-Ermolli's army reported large bodies of Russian troops moving forward, and a sudden increase in Russian radio traffic suggested that a resumption of Sakharov's attacks to the north of Brody was imminent. The following day, fighting flared up along the fronts of Falkenhayn's and Marwitz's groups, but the battle lines to the northeast of Brody remained quiet. One day later, the front line near the city erupted with heavy artillery fire. Before the morning mist had cleared, Russian troops had secured a foothold in the Austro-Hungarian defences immediately north of Brody, and despite the swift arrival of all available reinforcements, the Austro-Hungarian 25th Infantry Division was unable to hold its positions. Its northern flank was forced back at midday, and shortly after Russian attacks by XVII Corps developed towards Brody from Radziwiłow. There was bitter fighting along the axis of the railway line running from the east to Brody, and 27th Infantry Division beat off the first two assaults. During the afternoon, a third assault overwhelmed the defenders and by nightfall the front line had pulled back to improvised positions. There was a substantial gap to the south between 27th Infantry Division and *Gruppe Kosak*, and throughout the night troops were shuffled in an attempt to create a continuous line. On 26 July, Sakharov threw in the reinforced XLV Corps and XVII Corps, and by mid-morning all local Austro-Hungarian reserves were committed. Throughout the afternoon, repeated attempts by the Russians to advance along the railway line into Brody were beaten off with heavy casualties on both sides.

Aware that a Russian breakthrough to Brody would create a new crisis, Conrad urged Böhm-Ermolli to hold the city at all costs. The commander of Second Army doubted that this would be possible; even after taking into account reinforcements that were still en route, he estimated that his own forces amounted to 33,000 rifles and 176 guns, with between 50,000 and 80,000 Russian troops bearing down on them. He appealed to his neighbours for help; Bothmer responded that he had no troops to spare, while Marwitz could send only a few battalions, and these were unlikely to arrive for several hours. In the meantime, Sakharov threw in yet more troops in the form of XXXII Corps, and throughout the evening of 26 July wave after wave of Russian troops surged against the increasingly battered defences. The losses on both sides were heavy, and the assaults continued until the following day with little change in the front line. After a pause, there was a further attack during the afternoon of 27 July, and Böhm-Ermolli concluded that he would be unable to hold his positions. Rather than allow a breakthrough with all the resultant chaos and consequences, he ordered his men to fall back through Brody to new positions west of the town.



Eastern Front south of Pripet, 27 July

Gronau
XXXI
Stochod
Hauer
IV
3rd Army
Volodchenko
XLVI
Fath
Bernhardi
Kovel
II
I Turk
XXX
Special Army
I
X (Ger)
Gds
XXXIX
Władimir Wołynsk
XXIII
Lutsk
X (*k.u.k.*)
XL
4th Army
Szurmay
V
8th Army
Beckmann
VIII
Styr
Falkenhayn
V
Dubno
Sokal
Marwitz
Dieffenbach
XLV
11th Army
XXXII
XVIII
V Sib
Brody
XVII
Bug
Kosack
2nd Army
V
VII
IV
Lemberg
IX
V
Tarnopol
XVIII
South Army
Hofmann
7th Army
XXII
Podhajce
VI
XVI
XIII
II
II
Stanislau
3rd Army
Dniester
Kraewel
Hadfy
XXXIII
I
XLI
XII
VIII
Kolomea
Pruth
XI
Czernowitz
9th Army
Siret
Krauss
7th Army
Brudermann
Karp.
III
XI
N
0
30 miles
0
50km

Exhausted by their own losses, the Russians made little attempt to pursue, and early on 28 July a single Russian regiment from XVII Corps entered the town.

Sakharov was keen to exploit his success, regardless of the casualties his formations had suffered. He urged his troops to test the new Austro-Hungarian line, and pressure developed throughout the day. During the afternoon, Feldmarschallleutnant Ferdinand Kosak, who had taken command of all the formations fighting in and south of Brody, reported that he doubted his ability to prevent a further retreat. Concluding that whilst a further withdrawal was undesirable, it was far better than having several formations utterly destroyed, Böhm-Ermolli accepted his subordinate's judgement and ordered a retreat to a new line about 4 miles (7km) to the west of Brody. As the skies darkened that evening, Sakharov's probing attacks died away and Kosak's forces were able to pull back intact.

Kosak's troops might have an opportunity to get their breath back, but Sakharov felt that he still had enough strength to try to widen his penetration. On 30 July, he launched a major attack with his northern flank, but all attempts to drive back the mixed German and Austro-Hungarian formations ended in failure. By the end of the day, Sakharov had abandoned further assaults; Falkenhayn's group alone reported that over 2,000 Russian corpses had been left in front of their positions.[320]

Given that his orders had been downgraded from a planned assault on Brody, Sakharov had every reason to be satisfied with the outcome of the fighting. His own losses were heavy, but the city of Brody was back in Russian hands and serious damage had been inflicted upon another Austro-Hungarian army, with 34,000 more prisoners and forty-five guns being captured. Brusilov had dismissed Eleventh Army as being 'too weak to achieve anything serious' when he downgraded Sakharov's objectives, so it was a remarkable success, and had reserves been available it might have been possible to drive on towards the west, perhaps even threatening Lemberg.[321] Instead, Sakharov had to sit back and let his men recover from their exertions, while the main 'decisive' battle was fought elsewhere. It was, perhaps, a demonstration of the weakness of Brusilov's strategy. He had intentionally pressured the enemy front line at as many points as possible in the expectation that it would give way somewhere, but was unable to react rapidly to such positive developments to exploit them fully.

The Russian forces assembling for the assault towards Kovel could not fail to attract the attention of their enemies. By 21 July, the Central Powers had identified the arrival of the first elements of the Guards Army, with Bezobrazov's headquarters being established in Roziszcze. German and Austro-Hungarian forces were ordered to prepare local reserves and ensure their defences were intact, and both Conrad and Falkenhayn attempted to locate additional forces that they could send to the area; a division was moved from Prince Leopold's army group and held in readiness. The Russians, too, were moving additional troops into position, with Alexeyev assigning I Siberian Corps to Brusilov's planned assault in order to provide additional reinforcements for exploitation of any success. Artillery preparation had begun as early as 24 July and grew steadily stronger with each day. On 26 July, a strong Russian probing attack was launched against the German X Corps; it was repulsed without great difficulty, but it was a further sign, if any were needed, that as assault was imminent.

Winogradsky's division had been allotted a sector close to the Guards Army, and deployed its artillery to achieve a maximum concentration of firepower. He later wrote about the spirit of innovation that prevailed at the time:

> The plan … required the bulk of the division to concentrate in a small area to deliver the main blow on a front of 2km [just over a mile]. The lie of the land offered substantial advantages for defence in the passive sector [the rest of the division's frontage] where we were certain of an enemy counterattack and left our weaker elements there.
>
> Of the fifty-seven guns I had (twelve 120mm howitzers and forty-five 76mm guns), forty-six were to prepare for the main attack, divided into three sub-groups, while only nine remained in the passive sector, which was not overly risky as an enemy counterattack could be blocked with the covering fire of twelve guns from the first sub-group from their excellent emplacements close to the farm at Sadovo. In conclusion, despite the length of our frontage (more than 10km [6 miles]), we had succeeded in concentrating nearly all our firepower in 2km without serious risk. When it came to the artillery preparation, we had decided to fire a short but very intense barrage of no more than forty-five minutes. This idea was inspired by the suggestion of varying our methods of attack in an attempt to induce the enemy into making mistakes. They had grown used to long preparatory bombardments in the previous six weeks, which were always followed by a major effort but at the same time permitted the defender to concentrate his reserves at the most threatened points. On this occasion, a short preparation, an hour for example, sufficed to demolish the fieldworks – if only partly – and to lower the morale of the defenders and at the same time preserve the advantage for the attacker to improvise, to bring about a swift result. The infantry commanders on their part asked for us to dispense with creating breaches in the obstacle belt in order to shorten the period of preparation and avoid indicating to the enemy

> which points had been selected for the attack. The fine quality of our infantry in July 1916 guaranteed that they would find a means of getting past the barbed wire, allowing the [gun] batteries to concentrate their efforts solely on crushing the trenches and their defenders.[322]

There had been further changes in troop arrangements on both sides. Immediately southeast of Pinsk was *Gruppe Gronau*, which at the end of July was transferred to Prince Leopold's army group. To its south was *Gruppe Hauer*, composed mainly of cavalry but reinforced by the German 1st *Landwehr* Infantry Division. Next in line was *Korps Fath*, consisting of *Gruppe Clausius* – with the eponymous improvised German division commanded by Hermann Clausius and the Austro-Hungarian 53rd Infantry Division – in the north and *Gruppe Kneussl* in the south, with the Austro-Hungarian 45th and 26th Infantry Divisions and the Polish Legion. Then came II Corps, followed by *Gruppe Rusche*. To the southeast of Kovel, the front passed into the control of Tersztyánsky's Fourth Army, with the German X Corps in the north, the Austro-Hungarian X Corps and *Gruppe Szurmay* in the centre, and *Gruppe Beckmann* in the south. Further south was *Armeegruppe Marwitz*, with Falkenhayn's group.

The assault was to start on 28 July, but two infantry corps assigned to Lesh's Third Army from Ragosa's forces had still not finished taking up their positions. As a consequence, the attack intended to strike from the southeast towards the area west of Pinsk – largely by III Corps – was weak, and *Gruppe Gronau* had little difficulty repelling it. The movement of such large bodies of troops from Evert's West Front to Brusilov's South Front could not be hidden from the Germans, who took the opportunity to move troops of their own; Gronau received the veteran 1st Infantry Division, and remained confident that his positions would hold. There were repeated attacks in the closing days of July, but all were in vain – the German defences were too strong, and in any event the terrain was completely unsuitable for an attack. To the south of Gronau's positions, *Gruppe Hauer* came under almost no pressure at all – Russian attacks amounted to little more than aggressive raids. Similarly, though artillery fire continued through much of 28 July against the positions of *Gruppe Kneussl*, the few attacks that were launched were repulsed without difficulty. Here, at least, there was to be no repeat of the earlier collapse of defences; it seems that a combination of German formations intermingled with those of the *k.u.k.* Army, firm leadership, and prudent preparations for the Russian assault all combined to ensure that the defences were not significantly threatened.

The Russian artillery bombardment on 28 July was particularly intense against the southern part of *Gruppe Clausius*, where the Russian XLVI Corps stood ready to attack. During the afternoon, attacks developed further south against a small bridgehead on the east bank of the Stochod held by the Austro-Hungarian 26th Rifle Division around the eastern end of a demolished bridge, rapidly reducing it and forcing the survivors back across the river. For the moment at least, there was little attempt to pursue them across the Stochod and concentrated artillery and mortar fire drove the Russians away from the ruins of the bridge. Not far away, attacks developed against the Polish Legion but were repulsed without difficulty.

Fighting intensified along the Stochod on 29 July with heavy shelling and use of gas, with only the Polish sector remaining relatively quiet. Elements of the Russian 1st Turkestan Rifle Division succeeded in crossing the river, but every attempt to widen the bridgehead was crushed by defensive fire and a German counterattack towards the end of the afternoon drove the Russians back to the east bank. At the southern end of *Gruppe Clausius*, the Russian XLVI Corps succeeded in capturing the small town of Zarecze; Clausius committed his corps reserves to a counterattack, and by the end of the day the battle line ran through the western outskirts of Zarecze. The intention was to resume the counterattack early on 30 July, but the Russians struck first and turned the flank of an Austro-Hungarian formation to the west of Zarecze; it took until the afternoon for the line to be restored and a new counterattack to be mounted. Although it made some progress north of Zarecze, the Russians held on to a sandy ridge to the south in the face of every attempt to drive them back. By the following day, the German and Austro-Hungarian forces were exhausted and there was no prospect of any further counterattacks. Local reserves were exhausted, and with further Russian attacks to the south looking increasingly likely, there was a reluctance to commit higher-level reinforcements until there was greater clarity about the immediate future. The Russians remained in position south of Zarecze, but if Clausius' men couldn't drive them out, nor could they expand their bridgehead.

A great deal rested on the performance of Bezobrazov's Special Army, and it too launched its main attack on 28 July. Winogradsky described the initial bombardment:

> Firing was to commence at 4.30 a.m. on 28 July at a rate of two rounds per gun per minute; after ten minutes the rate would increase. At 4.50 a.m, [there would be] a very brief pause and firing further to the rear to simulate a false attack, after which we would resume heavy fire, slowly increasing the intensity to maximum firing rate a little before the attack (at 5.15 a.m.). At 5 a.m., three batteries would fire gas rounds against the numerous Austrian artillery located in the folds of the terrain around Linev and the village of Boubnov, where it was believed there was a headquarters, and at 5.15 a.m. firing would move to create a creeping barrage in front of the infantry.

> The howitzers were to maintain the same firing rate throughout and would demolish the most important fortifications.
>
> … Firing commenced exactly at 4.30 a.m. Our explosions covered the entire attack sector at a measured rate. The sub-group of two batteries of howitzers on the left covered the Austrian strongpoint at Sadovi-Lipniak, the right subgroup bombarded the front line, and fired scattered rounds at the edge of Kochevo and systematically cleared the communications trenches in depth. The Austrians were taken unawares, their artillery responded tardily with poorly spread shots and so ineffectual that there was no need to respond. The preparation followed the course outlined in the fire plan: the 76mm guns fired mixed shrapnel and high explosive of Russian and French manufacture that, as a result of accurate aiming, churned up the fighting and communications trenches perfectly. All the changes of aim were executed punctually and in a coordinated manner, and the gas rounds fired on time and with success.
>
> The 55th Regiment, which had approached the enemy lines under cover of darkness, attacked with admirable energy at 5.15 a.m. and, preceded by our creeping barrage, crossed a segment of the obstacle belt and reached the enemy trenches almost without loss. It took them half an hour to overcome the fortified network at Sadovi-Lipniak, after which the designated batteries directed their fire at the Linev bridge to cover the retreat of the vanquished Austrians. On the extreme right, the 56th Regiment – which was further from the enemy than the 55th – captured the ridge to the east of Kochevo without any loss of time. By 6 a.m., the entire attack sector was in our hands throughout its depth; reports poured in of the capture of numerous prisoners and guns, and the second gun group had already moved forward to support the advance; our neighbours on the right from XL Corps also reported excellent results.[323]

A loop in the course of the Stochod left the Hungarian 41st *Honvéd* Infantry Division holding positions that were exposed on both flanks to Russian artillery fire. After a prolonged bombardment, the Russian XXX Corps attacked during the afternoon of 28 July and immediately made progress, driving the Hungarian reservists from their first line of trenches. A force of Cossacks had been held ready for this moment and was unleashed against the retreating enemy. Again, Winogradsky watched the progress of the assault:

> From our observation post close to Sadovo, which had a magnificent view as far as Voynin Wood, we witnessed a rare spectacle. We could see clearly how the Austrians climbed from their entrenchments close to Vatinetz and clambered over

> the parapets. With their line of retreat cut by the capture of Linev and the presence of our cavalry, they surrendered after putting up feeble resistance here and there. The Cossacks galloped along the trenches and administered the *coup de grâce* to any who hesitated, and we saw their sabres glinting in the rays of the rising sun. The enemy batteries – positioned further to the left close to Boubnov, obstructed by their infantry and alarmed by the appearance of our horsemen closer and closer to their guns, began to retreat. The landscape was covered by isolated guns and caissons which made for Voynin Wood. Our light batteries immediately took aim at them, and the targets were so inviting that even the methodical howitzers could not resist taking part and fired off a few shells. One of them exploded close to a caisson: after the smoke had dispersed, we could see only the overturned caisson lying on the ground and a grey patch, which was all that remained of six horses and several men. We could also see elements of cavalry approaching the edge of Voynin Wood, closely pursuing the fugitives and cutting off their retreat.
>
> … By midday, the entire Austrian sector with its two most important strongpoints – Sadovo-Lipinsk and Hill 120.3 on the left – had clearly fallen. The 14th Infantry Division had taken 4,000 prisoners, capturing twenty-five guns and a hundred horses, 20 of these guns having been captured by the 55th Regiment where they had been struck by gas shells; the cavalry had captured 1,000 prisoners and 10 guns in its action.[324]

Despite this promising start, the fighting then followed a depressingly familiar pattern: counterattacks to retake the positions failed, but equally every attempt to expand the bridgehead also made no progress. Winogradsky described some of the problems that all attackers faced, and the limited efficacy of cavalry in their traditional exploitation role:

> The experience of trench warfare, particularly on the Western Front, unquestionably demonstrates that the exploitation of a penetration into the enemy's front must be carried out by fresh units following close behind the attacking force. This latter force has to pass through a short crisis brought on by the enormous physical and emotional demand that has just been made of them. The regiments are largely disorganised, communications disrupted and the commanders have lost control of events for a period of time. A small pause is necessary to reassemble units and give the exhausted men some rest, and usually the enemy is able to prevent advances with fresh formations. Further, unintended friction is always possible. For example, during the fighting of 28 July, my second group, which had at first followed and supported the infantry with impeccable speed, later did not maintain contact with

> the 56th Regiment when it was dispersed in the forest and was not able to support the attack on Shelvov with its customary vigour. A battalion of the 54th Regiment, brought forward from the reserves, was delayed by a misunderstanding … Without wishing to be critical, I must state that on 28 July the cavalry did not satisfy all the requirements one might have expected. Having spent eighteen months myself with that arm, I know how it is easily impressed by the strength of infantry, particularly those with machine-guns. Instead of attempting to outflank obstacles and resorting to horse artillery batteries, they frequently just stopped. I suggest that on 28 July, feeble rearguards supported by machine-guns succeeded in stopping the progress of our cavalry, particularly by using woodland, allowing the enemy command to organise the defence of pre-prepared positions from Shelvov to Voynin. It was particularly regrettable because based upon aerial observations and reports from prisoners that were gathered later, there was indescribable disorder near the Lokachi bridges, blocked by a crowd of vehicles, which could all have been the prize of an audacious raid.[325]

Overnight, more artillery ammunition was brought up for the Russian guns, and a new bombardment began before dawn on 29 July. XXX Corps attacked again in the early afternoon and once more drove 41st *Honvéd* Infantry Division back. Taking advantage of a small break in the defensive lines, the Russians enveloped the division's northern flank and destroyed an infantry regiment. For a moment, the lines of II Corps seemed to be in danger of breaking up, but local commanders threw in what troops they could spare, at least slowing the Russian advance. While Kaiser, the corps commander, scraped together disparate battalions to assemble a counterattack force, the other flank of 41st *Honvéd* Infantry Division also began to give way and the Russians penetrated to the third line of defences. With the Hungarians clearly approaching collapse after losing two thirds of their number, Kaiser abandoned his planned counterattack and ordered a retreat. To a large extent, the perilous situation was the result of holding a bend in the Stochod that projected towards the east; by falling back to the base of the bend, II Corps would have a shorter line to defend without having to expose any forces to flanking fire.

This withdrawal was carried out without difficulty, and there was an inevitable pause while the Russians brought forward their artillery and constructed bridges over the Stochod. On 1 August, battle was resumed with a repetition of heavy artillery fire followed by infantry assaults. A steady stream of German battalions had been fed into the line in the preceding day, and more continued to arrive; much as Ludendorff and others had anticipated, this resulted in the neighbouring

Austro-Hungarian formations showing greater resilience, and all further Russian attacks were repulsed with varying degrees of difficulty. After a pause to regroup, the Russians tried again on 3 August, shifting their point of emphasis a little to the north to try to turn II Corps' northern flank. The Polish legion – with a Bavarian battalion as reinforcement – succeeded in repulsing all attacks, but the Russians were able to drive into the positions of the Austro-Hungarian 4th Infantry Division. Late in the day, a determined counterattack restored the situation; both sides were back where they had started, with a further increase in casualties.

Bezobrazov had massed the two Guards infantry corps, with the Guards Cavalry Corps in support, on the southern flank of his army. The neighbouring Eighth Army had also concentrated XXXIX and XXIII Corps in the adjoining sector, with the intention of forcing the line of the Stochod; once this formidable force had secured crossings, the Guards would push on towards Kovel while Eighth Army's forces protected the southern flank of the assault. Artillery preparation commenced in earnest at dawn on 28 July against both the front line and the immediate rear areas. For half an hour at midday, the barrage intensified against the Austro-Hungarian 29th Infantry Division; then, in line abreast, exactly according to pre-war doctrine, the Guards advanced. Despite suffering heavy losses, they pressed home their attack with determination and bitter fighting raged along the entire line. Although gaps were forced in the defences, the intensity of the defensive fire greatly restricted the ability of the Guards to exploit any successes; their axis of attack ran across terrain that was singularly unsuitable for a massed attack, broken up by folds in the ground and numerous small copses and areas of swamp. Although there were local gains, the price paid was huge. On the southern flank of the attack by the Guards, where Eighth Army's XXIII Corps moved forward, German observers reported that after the first Russian attack was driven to ground by defensive fire, they saw Russian officers drawing their sabres and using them to drive their men forward.[326] The attacks were all in vain, disintegrating in a storm of shelling and machine-gun fire.

Part of the front line in this sector lay east of the Stochod, and this ground was abandoned by the defenders during the following evening, with the result that the new front ran along the river itself. As a consequence, 29 July passed relatively quietly while the Guards moved their artillery forward and prepared for a new assault.

A little to the south, the northern flank of Eighth Army continued to try to force its way forward. Once more, gains were modest compared to the punishing casualties, and on 30 July the entire sector erupted again as the Guards tried to push across the Stochod. After a brief pause the following day, another major attempt was made in 1 August; all were beaten off by the determined defenders. The following day, Knox visited the front line:

> We were bombarded by aeroplanes from 6 a.m. till 8 a.m., casualties several horses and eleven rank and file.
>
> I started soon after 9 a.m., and drove over dreadful roads to the headquarters of II Guards Corps. I did not see Rauch … I then drove on through desolate country to Tristen, where I found the staff of the Guards Rifle Division … as the Austrian line ran immediately in advance of Tristen, the village suffered terribly in the recent battle, and has only a single house standing – that occupied by the staff.
>
> The situation is pretty rotten. Alexeyev seems to have thought that the Germans would not make a serious attempt to defend Kovel, but we find we have strong defences to attack everywhere.
>
> Units in the army seem to have been badly distributed. The Stochod marshes are impassable, except by narrow causeways on the whole front … XXX Corps is reduced to 10,000 bayonets [about one-third establishment strength], 71st [Infantry] Division on its left having suffered severely yesterday. I Corps has only 10,000 bayonets. The losses of the Guards since the 25th are estimated at 30,000.
>
> The attack on Vitonej yesterday failed completely, the village being found to be strongly fortified with many machine-guns. The fortifications were not expected, because our aeroplanes have been unable to photograph anything in the enemy's rear owing to his complete command of the air. The artillery has been hopelessly handicapped in its work by the lack of aerial observation …
>
> It does not look as if we would reach Kovel.[327]

Knox later learned the details of one of the disastrous attacks that had been mounted:

> I heard something about the attack of the Rifle Division. The section chosen – southwest of Vitonej – seems to have been about as ill-selected as can be imagined. The men had to ford a marsh wading up to their middles. The losses, which are estimated at 70 per cent, were greater, owing to the ten months in rear having been spent too much in close-order drill.
>
> The wounded sank slowly in the marsh, and it was impossible to send them help.
>
> … We walked on to the most advanced houses in the village of Babie, whence I got a glimpse of the fatal marsh. The young officer [who was accompanying Knox] said that it was a 'pity that we spared our guns so much', for if we had

> brought them up secretly at night to the edge of a wood, whence the enemy's defences might have been destroyed at point-blank range, we might have avoided most of the loss incurred during the attack on Koloniya Ostrov.
>
> Similarly the officers of a battery of the Guards Rifle Division that I visited told me that they could have destroyed Vitonej, but no one told them to fire at it. The Guards Rifles were supported by the Moskovsky Regiment in the attack on Vitonej, and the latter's attack seems to have been carried out without any artillery preparation, no passages being cut in the enemy's wire.
>
> The splendid courage of the infantry was wasted, owing to the absolute lack of artillery support … Of course, there was the usual lack of mutual support between units. There has been too much close-order drill and too little practice in combined manoeuvre in the ten months' past. The Russian command spends all its time in teaching the Russian soldier to die, instead of teaching him to conquer.[328]

The losses suffered by the Guards divisions were appalling – nearly 50 per cent of their infantry strength was gone in the first week of operations for almost no gain. With only the reluctant *Polivanovtsy* at their disposal, Brusilov and his army commanders had trained their troops used to such good effect in June in half the time that the selected elite of the Guards had been undergoing training before being sent back to war. Southwest Front's training programme had been hugely influenced by the lessons learned at such great cost in the first two years of the war. By contrast, the Guards were subjected to a training programme drawn up by men whose only qualification to hold their posts was their membership of the inner circle that surrounded the Romanovs.

Elsewhere, things turned out differently. Tersztyánsky's Fourth Army had been shattered in early June, and although it had received considerable reinforcements, many of these had been worn down in the attempts to support Marwitz's counteroffensive. It consisted of five infantry divisions and a single cavalry division, all of them relatively strong in terms of numbers, but weak in every respect that mattered – artillery, morale and leadership. Tersztyánsky and his corps commanders had extracted formations from the front line to create local reserves, but the resilience of the front line in the face of determined attacks was questionable. Kaledin had XL Corps and part of VIII Corps, supported by V Cavalry corps, deployed for an attack towards Władimir Wołynsk, and the first assault on 28 July was in the sector defended by *Gruppe Szurmay*. After substantial artillery preparation, the initial infantry assault came shortly after dawn, and immediately penetrated into the first line of defences manned by 70th *Honvéd* Infantry Division, scattering an infantry brigade and capturing an artillery battery. Division-level reserves – like those in the front line, these were Hungarian reservists – were thrown into the battle and put to flight in short order. Szurmay issued orders for troops from a regular division to be sent to restore the situation, but for once the Russian attackers had cavalry close to hand to exploit the initial success. Two mounted divisions burst through the gap that had been created by the initial success of the Russian infantry and swept into the immediate rear area, overrunning artillery and headquarters units and exposing the northern flank of the neighbouring 11th Infantry Division – one of the very few occasions that mounted troops performed in the manner in which they were expected to. By mid-morning, four artillery batteries had been captured and 70th *Honvéd* Infantry Division was in full retreat.

While Tersztyánsky struggled to find sufficient reserves to restore the situation – some of those he had nominated to be held back had already been thrown into the front line by local commanders – news arrived that the neighbouring Austro-Hungarian X Corps was also being driven back in disorder; both its flanking formations had been put to flight by the first Russian attack, and the central division had no choice but to retreat to prevent possible encirclement. At 8 a.m., Tersztyánsky received a signal from Linsingen that must have sounded depressingly familiar: the army group commander was of the opinion that the attacking Russian forces did not represent an overwhelming force, but were only the troops that had been standing opposite Fourth Army before the attack. The Russian attacks were merely an attempt to draw in German reserves from other sectors, and their advance therefore had to be halted without further ado. With so many of his formations melting away before his eyes, the reaction of the intemperate Tersztyánsky can be imagined, though Linsingen's assessment was fairly accurate: the Russian attack had been mounted with at best a modest superiority in numbers, and its success was entirely due to the manner in which the defences collapsed. Grimly, Tersztyánsky passed Linsingen's instructions on to his corps commanders, but news continued to arrive of further setbacks. The Russian XL Corps continued its attacks in strength, preventing the retreating Austro-Hungarian forces from maintaining any sense of order. Some succeeded in reaching and manning a secondary line of defence, but others were swept away by the victorious Russians.

Szurmay managed to bring his men to a halt about 3 miles (5km) behind their original positions, partly through the help of German troops from *Gruppe Leonhardi* to the south, but there was no hiding the fact that once again, Fourth Army had proved to be fragile in the extreme. Half the manpower deployed by the diminished army in the front line had disappeared – 15,000 men had been killed, wounded or taken prisoner, and forty-five guns captured by the Russians.[329]

As had been the case throughout the summer, a remarkably high proportion of the losses – perhaps as many as two thirds – consisted of men who had surrendered rather than making any attempt to stand their ground. Tersztyánsky sent a report back to *AOK* describing the brittleness of his formations and their inability to make their presence felt in counterattacks, and made little attempt to hide his personal disappointment and chagrin, adding the comment 'Until today, I was an undefeated field commander.'[330]

Given the previous reaction of Linsingen to failures by Fourth Army, it is remarkable that the official Austro-Hungarian history of the war describes the army group commander's response as 'completely surprising'.[331] Even as Tersztyánsky and his corps commanders set about reorganising their depleted forces late on 28 July, Linsingen sent a signal advising Tersztyánsky that Karl Litzmann was being sent to take command of the defences of Fourth Army; it was a further step in the 'Germanisation' of the entire command structure on the Eastern Front.

Hindenburg and Ludendorff were now taking up their new duties to oversee the troubled sector, and the arrival of Litzmann – who had enjoyed great success under their command at Łódź in 1914, the Masurian Lakes in early 1915 and at the capture of Kovno later that year – was a welcome development for them. Similarly, Oberst Emil Hell, who had been part of the Hindenburg-Ludendorff group since the heady days of Tannenberg, was now Linsingen's chief of staff; indeed, Litzmann believed that his appointment to his new command owed much to the suggestion of Hell.[332] It is interesting to note that according to his own account, Litzmann became aware of his new appointment on 26 July, two days before the latest crisis in Fourth Army; if his account is accurate, it suggests that Linsingen was already anticipating the need for German commanders to intervene before the Russian attack commenced. Litzmann reached Kovel towards the end of 28 July, where he was greeted at the railway station by Hell:

> He reported that the tactical command of the *k.u.k.* Fourth Army would pass to me, as its commander, Generaloberst von Tersztyánsky, had proved himself incapable. The army group would issue a corresponding order. Today, 28 July, it had again been driven back with very heavy losses. Its leadership had lost its head.
>
> Generaloberst von Linsingen appeared on the railway platform. I stepped down to report to my new commander. He was sure that Tersztyánsky would soon be 'dethroned'. But the outcome was rather different![333]

Conrad had appointed Tersztyánsky to command Fourth Army in the hope and expectation that he would prove robust enough to stand up to what he regarded as Linsingen's domineering attitude, and from this account it seems that Linsingen had every intention of removing Tersztyánsky from his post at the first available opportunity. Litzmann's opinion about the Austro-Hungarian forces assigned to him is worth closer scrutiny:

> My first personal war experiences with Austro-Hungarian troops – in southern Poland in the autumn of 1914 – had not left me with a good impression. What I had learned since then had the same effect on me. From the outset, it was clear to me that it would be harder for me to achieve success with these troops than it had been for me before [when he commanded German troops]. Yet the difficulties of the new task had their own special attraction and on this occasion too I was confident of finding solutions. I owed my success in this largely thanks to a predominant character trait in the *k.u.k.* officer corps: their good-natured amiability. From the first – and in part somewhat difficult – days of working with them, I found almost all of my subordinate officers very accommodating. They saw that I wanted nothing but to serve our common cause, and that my demands – utmost devotion to duty by soldiers and officers, unshakable resolve, strict field discipline and particularly better attention to the welfare of the troops – were right and achievable. Many Austro-Hungarian comrades said to me and wrote to me that they were happy to be under German command. A few became close friends.
>
> Even before the war, I had been pleased with German-Austrian troops wherever I had encountered them, for example in the Alps. During the war, I was mainly in contact with personnel of other nationalities: Czechs, Slovaks, Poles and Ruthenians, Italians, Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Romanians and particularly Hungarians. Many have repeatedly stated that such a mix of nationalities was the greatest weakness of the Dual Monarchy. An army derived from them could not have the strength of our German Army. It was unrealistic to expect Slovenes, Czechs and Poles to fight for the Austrian crown with devotion and perseverance. Even the officers of these nationalities could not be relied upon.
>
> The *k.u.k.* officers had to overcome constant language difficulties that were unknown amongst us [the German Army] in order to impose their personal will upon their troops. The best of them could indeed make themselves understood in a couple of languages; yet they needed to master between eight and ten to be able to carry out their duties in all situations. But they often placed inadequate value on establishing close personal relations with their men. I have met Austrian officers who had been in the field with their Austrian troops for two years and were still unable to speak to their men. When I asked in astonishment how that was possible, I was given the answer that the Hungarian language was 'far too difficult' …

> For centuries, the Prussian Army had been accustomed to iron devotion to duty. The officers and soldiers of the great Electors, of King Frederick William I, Frederick the Great, and Kaisers Wilhelm I and II had learned to overcome the general human tendency towards comfort. And since 1866, the Frederican-Kantian spirit of the Prussian Army had become common to the entire German Army. The lords who stood at the top of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy were of a different nature than those of the rugged north, and it was probably right to say that only one powerful personality had come from their ranks: the great Empress Maria Theresa. [The Austro-Hungarian monarchs] had neglected the *k.u.k.* Army and had not given it the eminence in their country that ours had, and that would inspire it to the highest devotion to duty.
>
> The carefree, easygoing attitude of Austrian officers and their inadequate training in soldiering and leadership resulted in events during the war that were incomprehensible to us Germans and occasionally led to the most serious consequences …
>
> At the beginning of the war, the *k.u.k.* Army had demonstrated bold enterprise and had a striking initial success. But then had come the setbacks … The flower of the officer corps and other ranks was gone; in place of the desire for victory was a gloomy pessimism. The catastrophe at Lutsk had made this situation still worse.[334]

On 29 July, Litzmann proceeded to Fourth Army Headquarters in Władimir Wołynsk, intending to take command, only to learn that Linsingen's decision had been overruled by Conrad. Instead, Litzmann was to take command of *Gruppe Szurmay* and a segment of front line immediately to the south, which had previously been under the control of *Gruppe Marwitz*. Swallowing his pride, he presented himself to Tersztyánsky, under whose command he would have to serve. His immediate impression of the commander of Fourth Army was not good:

> He had a very elegant appearance, very tall and slim, with fiery dark eyes, and I could well imagine that it was mainly thanks to these external features that despite constant military setbacks he had been able to hold high office. It was only in 1917, after he had also brought the *k.u.k.* Third Army to destruction at Stanislau, that he was dismissed – to the great joy of his Austrian subordinates, amongst whom he was strongly disliked, largely with good reason.[335]

This is not entirely a fair assessment. To date, Tersztyánsky had – as he himself had written – enjoyed considerable success, and it was only after his arrival at Fourth Army that his misfortunes began. Unlike many Austro-Hungarian officers, he drove his subordinates hard, and it seems inconsistent of Litzmann on the one hand to criticise the *k.u.k.* officer corps for being too laid back and easygoing, and on the other hand to regard their dislike of a hard taskmaster like Tersztyánsky as having 'good reason'.

Thankfully for Fourth Army, Kaledin's troops did not press their assaults on 29 July, and both sides spent the day reorganising their units prior to further combat. After his meeting with Tersztyánsky, Litzmann travelled to Szurmay's headquarters:

> I found Szurmay in a desperate state of mind. He complained that Leonhardi's cavalry on his right flank regarded itself as too weak to hold its current positions against the superior opposing enemy forces. In the centre, 11th Infantry Division numbered only 2,450 rifles and greatly reduced artillery. The worst however was the 'great unreliability' of the men of this division, who were mainly Ruthenian. They were largely sympathetic to the Russians and had deserted en masse. They also fled to the rear from their positions. They would then probably come under fire from their own military police; 'But we can't gun down entire regiments.' The remaining officers did nothing to change this shameful state of affairs; 'because they are unable to speak to their men as they don't speak Ruthenian, and thus have no influence, or because they themselves are Ruthenian and run off with them.' On his left flank, 70th *Honvéd* Infantry Division had a combat strength of only 940 rifles. On the other hand, 1,470 men had arrived yesterday as replacements; however, the training of these men was only just beginning.[336]

Before he moved on, Litzmann exhorted Szurmay to show the greatest possible resolve. Whilst the Austro-Hungarian officer made a poor impression upon Litzmann, he was more relieved to find that his most southern formation, the German 108th Infantry Division, was under the command of Generalleutnant Max Beckmann, who had commanded 80th Reserve Infantry Division in Litzmann's corps during the Second Battle of the Masurian Lakes. Whilst Beckmann was content with his men, he advised Litzmann that throughout the recent fighting, Szurmay's headquarters had not informed him on any occasion when withdrawals were taking place, leaving Beckmann's northern flank exposed to Russian forces. Beckmann had also allocated some of his German troops as reinforcements to the dismounted Austro-Hungarian 10th Cavalry Division in an attempt to improve its resilience, and Litzmann decided to give Beckmann overall command not only of his division, but of the cavalry that made up the rest of the forces between *Gruppe Szurmay* and *Gruppe Marwitz*. The contrast between the Prussian Beckmann and the Austro-Hungarian officers of whom Litzmann, Linsingen and others had such a low opinion could not have been greater:

> Generalleutnant Beckmann was the model of a dutiful Prussian general. With iron physical and mental endurance, to my knowledge he was never ill or on leave during the war, but devoted himself to his duty day after day with all his efforts. He was personally undemanding and was content with the variable accommodation and food. On this occasion, I found him in a paltry wooden hut with a field bed, table and two straw stools. Only the large operational maps on the walls indicated that it was a division staff headquarters. This outstanding soldier always had the warmest concern for his men.[337]

Litzmann had brought many of his staff officers from XL Corps with him, and swiftly assigned them to his subordinate formations as liaison officers. His preparations underwent their first test on 30 July when increasing shellfire signalled a resumption of Kaledin's attacks. The shelling was followed by a Russian infantry attack and penetrated into the trenches of Csanády's X Corps; Tersztyánsky immediately committed newly arrived German battalions in a counterattack and restored the situation. For the rest of the day, Kaledin's troops struggled forward repeatedly, but the presence of German officers seemed to make a significant difference; there were no further episodes of panic, and the line held. Kaledin had neither the human reserves nor the ammunition to continue his attempts to penetrate to Władimir Wołynsk, and fighting gradually died down.

The initial success of Kaledin's troops against Fourth Army was in stark contrast to the fighting along the Stochod, where the only modest successes came where the defences were in exposed positions; wherever the line ran along the river, the waters of the Stochod – enhanced by summer rain – and the generally swampy terrain ensured that the Russian attacks would struggle to prevail. Although some Austro-Hungarian formations proved to be fragile in the north, there were few consequent disasters, and the Russian attacks showed all of the problems of previous assaults: there was inadequate reconnaissance, partly because of German air superiority on this occasion; artillery preparation was haphazard and lacked the precision of Brusilov's attacks of June; there were significant numbers of German defenders who proved to be far more obdurate than their allies; and the antiquated tactics of the Guards divisions almost guaranteed failure. By contrast, Kaledin was faced by demoralised Austro-Hungarian formations and still retained the modern tactics that Brusilov's subordinates had put to such good use, even if he had lost a large proportion of the well-trained *Polivanovtsy* who launched the initial assaults in early June. Unfortunately for Brusilov, it had already been decided to attempt to take Kovel by the most direct approach, even though this led through swampland and over the Stochod; had one or two of the infantry corps squandered in the north been available to exploit Kaledin's success on 28 July, it is likely that follow-up attacks the following day could have torn open Tersztyánsky's army before Litzmann and other Germans could make a difference, and it might have been possible to reach Kovel by first taking Władimir Wołynsk, then turning north. However, this is to be wise after the event. Alexeyev and Brusilov had made their plans to make the main effort further north, largely because this placed the assault closer to the large numbers of Russian troops still concentrated within West Front, and it was hoped that if Kovel was reached, this might create sufficient weakness for Evert finally to commence an advance. After the direct route to Kovel had been selected, rail lines behind the front line were inadequate to switch troops and munitions fast enough to take advantage of any unexpected gains in the south.

The fighting that extended from 28 July into early August was curiously disjointed, given that Russian plans had been in preparation for some considerable time. When he drew up his plans for the original offensive of June, Brusilov was insistent on maintaining pressure on a wide front in order to prevent his opponents from redeploying their troops from one sector to another. Although Lesh, Bezobrazov and Kaledin all launched their attacks on the same day, none of them were able to maintain their efforts for long, and Linsingen was able to use the pauses between Russian attacks to good effect; once Lesh's initial attack in the north faltered, Prince Leopold extended the remit of his army group a little to the south, allowing Linsingen to concentrate his forces in the threatened sectors. With the notable exception of the exploitation of the initial success of Kaledin's attack on Fourth Army, the substantial Russian cavalry formations continued to languish in the rear, doing nothing other than using up valuable food and logistic support and hindering the movements of other units.

At the southern end of the Eastern Front, Lechitsky and Shcherbachev had also attacked on 28 July. Conrad's hopes of a grand counteroffensive along the Dniester valley continued to be delayed by the need to divert troops originally intended for the counterattack to other sectors, and instead of concentrating resources in preparation for the proposed advance, a desperate scramble to stop further Russian advances developed. Shcherbachev drove in the southern flank of Bothmer's South Army with his first assault on 28 July, but subsequent attacks failed to make any further progress. Nevertheless, there was no prospect of

Bothmer being able to spare troops for other areas; his northern flank was already threatened by the defeat of Böhm-Ermolli's troops at Brody, and there was now a strong threat to the south. To make matters worse, Conrad agreed to a request from Böhm-Ermolli for a withdrawal on 29 July, leaving Bothmer's northern flank exposed. The German South Army was now part of Archduke Karl's army group, and in his role as the archduke's chief of staff, Seeckt sent a message to *OHL* informing Falkenhayn that in his opinion, there was no necessity for Böhm-Ermolli's retreat, as the Russians had not yet made any serious attempt to push west from Brody. However, bowing to reality, he had no alternative but to order Bothmer to pull back to the west. To date, South Army had been the exception on the southern sector, generally holding its positions despite local Russian gains; it was now forced to withdraw because of the weakness of its neighbours.

It was not just the failure of Second Army to hold Brody that forced Bothmer to retreat. Shcherbachev's Seventh Army had massed six infantry divisions from II and XVI Corps against the southern wing of South Army. As was the case elsewhere, artillery preparation commenced on 28 July, followed by several infantry attacks. All were repulsed with heavy losses. The same pattern occurred the following day, and on 30 July Shcherbachev concentrated his artillery for a heavier, more localised barrage before attacking the Austro-Hungarian XIII Corps. Finally, the attackers gained a foothold in the first line of defences, repulsing determined German and Austro-Hungarian counterattacks. But the magic of the June breakthroughs eluded the Russians. Attempts to widen the penetration were crushed repeatedly by artillery and infantry fire, and though Seventh Army continued to launch attacks into early August, they grew steadily weaker before ceasing entirely. Nevertheless, the attacks had served a purpose: Bothmer was unable to divert troops to the north to help eliminate the need for Böhm-Ermolli to withdraw.

In Galicia, Lechitsky repeated the successful tactics of earlier attacks; his men had used the pause in fighting to prepare carefully, and a prolonged artillery bombardment, including the use of gas against Austro-Hungarian artillery positions, extended far into the morning of 28 July while the Russian infantry moved into their forward saps, some of which had been dug to less than 100m from the Austro-Hungarian defences. When they attacked, the troops of the Russian XII Corps swiftly penetrated the first line of defences, overwhelming the northern flank of *Gruppe Hadfy*. Although the swift commitment of all local reserves sealed off the Russian penetration, the centre of *Gruppe Hadfy*, held by 21st Rifle Division, then collapsed in the face of further Russian attacks.

Fortunately for the defenders, the German 119th and 105th Infantry Divisions had been deployed in the defensive line, and although both formations now came under pressure and had to retreat to avoid being encircled, abandoning four artillery batteries that kept firing until overwhelmed in order to cover the withdrawal, their determined resistance took the impetus out of Lechitsky's attack. The front line moved about 3 miles (5km) west to new positions outside Stanislau; a worried Archduke Karl warned Conrad that his men had fallen back to the last prepared position, and any further setbacks might trigger a much larger retreat.

Lechitsky had added another 8,000 prisoners and thirty-five guns to his already impressive haul of gains.[338] However, at the moment when Archduke Karl was beginning to despair, the Russian commander hesitated, and the moment of opportunity passed. By the end of 30 July, relieved German and Austro-Hungarian officers reported that the Russians were digging in and showed no signs of pressing their advantage. A steady trickle of reinforcements gradually restored the strength of Kövesz's army, and there was now time to prepare secondary positions in case they were needed.

Pflanzer-Baltin and Zeynek continued to grumble about German interference in their command. Russian attempts to penetrate into the Tatar Pass in late July were blocked by the timely deployment of reserves, but Zeynek complained that Seeckt questioned all his decisions, effectively robbing Seventh Army of any independence in its decision-making:

> We no longer had the freedom to deploy our own forces, but had to secure the agreement of the army group command for every decision. When the archduke visited us with Seeckt on 27 July, the tone was so stiff that we felt less like comrades in arms and more as if we were being accused … Archduke Karl asked me to be more compliant towards General von Seeckt. I had only one wish, to be dismissed from my post.[339]

From the German perspective, such detailed control of the *k.u.k.* Army was precisely what was needed. The resentment of Austro-Hungarian officers was as predictable as was the manner in which the Germans simply ignored it.

While senior commanders grumbled and wrangled about areas of responsibility, the soldiers in the front line continued to die. Florence Farmborough, a British nurse who had volunteered to work with the Russians, was close to the front line on the Dniester, and described a typical scene in her diary on 10 August:

> The dead are still lying scattered in odd, unnatural positions, precisely where they fell: broken, bent, at full stretch, face down, their faces pressed into the earth. Austrians and Russians lie side by side. And one could see shredded, crushed corpses that had turned the ground dark. There was an Austrian with only one leg, his face black and swollen, another with a shattered face, a Russian soldier hanging in barbed wire, his legs bent beneath him. And in more than one open wound were flies and other creeping, wormlike things … Just a short time ago, these 'heaps' had been living human beings; young men, full of strength. Now they lay there still and lifeless, clumsy figures who had been living flesh and bone. Life is so ephemeral and fragile![340]

It had been Archduke Karl's intention to build a force around four or five German divisions in the Carpathians with a view of attacking into the deep rear of the southern flank of the Russian armies; this was very similar to several attempts that had been made in 1915, none of which achieved the desired result. On this occasion, it proved impossible to allocate the required troops to the Carpathians, as they were required elsewhere to deal with Brusilov's continuing attacks. An initial attack by *Gruppe Brudermann* – consisting of a cavalry division and a single infantry brigade – was rapidly brought to a standstill by the Russians, and attempts were made to renew the advance by adding the limited resources of the German *Karpatenkorps*. To the irritation of Zeynek and others, this resulted in the assault group coming under the control of the German commander of the *Karpatenkorps*, Richard von Conta. On 3 August the combined forces attacked the Russian XI Corps and made early progress, capturing the initial line of defences; when the Russians pulled back to the next ridgeline, it proved impossible to continue the attack. There would have to be a pause while the artillery was laboriously brought forward through the mountains and forests.

After the assaults towards Kovel faltered, Brusilov held a meeting in Lutsk with Kaledin and Bezobrazov. Alexeyev had sent telegrams stating his growing impatience with the lack of progress, and the commander of Southwest Front discussed the prospects of success with his subordinates. Bezobrazov maintained that the Special Army would succeed, but that the advance would be a slow one. Kaledin promised to support the southern flank of Bezobrazov's attack, but felt that he could do no more against the Austro-Hungarian Fourth Army. Brusilov's preference was to maintain pressure along the entire front, but on 2 August Alexeyev insisted to Klembovsky, Brusilov's chief of staff, on concentration at a few key points, claiming that Brusilov's approach had failed. This failure was largely due to the inability – due to poor logistics and poor leadership – of the armies of Southwest Front to maintain their pressure for more than a day or two rather than any flaw in Brusilov's strategic vision, but he reluctantly agreed to follow Alexeyev's advice. Lesh would continue to put pressure on the Pinsk sector, but was to devote the bulk of his effort to a point further south on the Stochod line, where he would receive I Siberian Corps as reinforcements; immediately to his south, the Combined Army would try once more to batter its way through to Kovel, with the three divisions of the Guards Cavalry Corps deployed on foot; and Kaledin was to concentrate on pinning down as much of Tersztyánsky's Fourth Army as possible, in order to prevent Linsingen moving troops to the Stochod front. Brusilov informed Alexeyev of his intentions, and at the same time requested better aerial support to allow for tethered balloons to be raised, giving his artillery the opportunity to observe targets and adjust fire. The response was that whilst Russia had sufficient aeroplanes, most of them had been supplied by the Western Allies and were still in crates in distant Archangelsk; the railway system was simply not adequate to move them south quickly enough to matter. Southwest Front's gunners would have to make do without fighter cover.[341]

At the same time, Brusilov made clear his displeasure at the failure of Lechitsky to take advantage of his initial gains south of the Dniester. The commander of Ninth Army replied that his opponent had withdrawn to a strongly fortified position, and it would take time to prepare for a new assault. This was not an accurate assessment; as already described, Kövesz and Archduke Karl had expressed doubts about the ability of their forces to prevent a major retreat. Lechitsky was also driven by concerns about Pflanzer-Baltin's forces in the Carpathians. The Russians did not have all the details of the rearrangement and division of forces carried out by the Central Powers, and there appeared to be evidence that far from being made up of the remnants of Seventh Army with the incomplete German *Karpatenkorps*, Pflanzer-Baltin was in command of an entirely new Twelfth Army. This had of course been the original intention, with substantial German forces providing additional strike power, but these divisions had been diverted elsewhere. In any event, experience of fighting in this region throughout 1915 should have made it clear to both sides that it was simply impossible to sustain high-tempo operations through the ridges to the north of the Carpathian Mountains. The terrain was ideal for defensive operations; there were few good roads; and the railway lines required to feed the voracious appetite of armies for ammunition and other supplies were of very limited capacity. Lechitsky's fears for his southern flank were as misplaced as Archduke Karl's high expectations. Brusilov asked Alexeyev for cavalry reinforcements to be sent to the Carpathians so that Lechitsky could concentrate his more powerful infantry in preparation for a further drive towards the west, but Alexeyev responded by ordering Brusilov to move troops from the relatively stationary Seventh Army, which was unlikely to make further progress, to Lechitsky's Ninth Army. Brusilov duly moved XVIII Corps south, and added a Cossack division from Third Army. This would provide more than enough strength to allow Lechitsky to mask the Carpathians while pushing on to the west. Whilst this made good military sense, there were other considerations too: Romania continued to hesitate about joining the Entente, and it was important to ensure that there were no embarrassing setbacks close to the Romanian frontier. Conversely, further successes might spur the Romanians on to make a definite decision.

Brusilov issued orders for the offensive of Southwest Front to be resumed on 7 August. The two infantry corps of the Russian Guards had suffered crippling losses, and would be supported by the dismounted troops of the Guards' cavalry formations. At the same time, the changes in command arrangements on the other side of the front line began to have an impact. Hindenburg and Ludendorff arrived in Kovel on 3 August to take up their new duties, and met Linsingen and his colleagues:

> The mood in this high command was of course very earnest, but strongly united. It was abundantly clear that despite their extraordinary losses, the Russians would soon restart and sustain their attacks. They had enough men, but used them too carelessly; these tactics had given them no successes against our thinly held lines. The army group command hoped to be able to master the situation.
>
> … By the evening [of 3 August] we were in Władimir Wołynsk at Fourth Army Headquarters, which was subordinated to General von Linsingen. The army was thoroughly permeated with German troops. The commander, Generaloberst Tersztyánsky, a nervous gentleman, was greatly concerned with 'Austrian prestige' and consequently had had several difficulties with General von Linsingen …
>
> Generaloberst Tersztyánsky spoke remarkably frankly at the time about the conduct of the *k.u.k.* troops in the recent fighting. We did not get a favourable impression.
>
> The next morning, we were in Lemberg, the headquarters of the *k.u.k.* Second Army. The beauty of Lemberg and its German appearance surprised me. It was a complete contrast to Krakow, which throughout has the character of a Polish town. We found General von Böhm-Ermolli and his chief of staff, General Bardolf, to be clear-sighted and astute soldiers, and it was always a pleasure for all German officials to cooperate with them. They made no attempt to hide the poor strength to resist of their troops … Both men were delighted to have a mixed

> German contingent for the coming days … We spent only a few hours in the camaraderie of this high command and left with the feeling that it was functioning at its peak.
>
> In Lemberg, I also spoke to General von Seeckt, who reported that the situation of Army Group Archduke Karl, south of the Dniester, was very serious … the fate of this army group meant life or death to us … although it was not subordinated to us, we had to take account of the circumstances of this army group. We therefore helped out …
>
> During the return to Brest-Litovsk … we spoke again with General von der Marwitz and Litzmann, who now led mixed German and *k.u.k.* troops in the ranks of *Heeresgruppe Linsingen*. In the event of a further Russian attack, which they thought likely, they regarded their situation as very serious, and gave examples of the recent fighting to justify this. Like General Litzmann, General von der Marwitz had a magnificent soldierly character and was an unflinching leader, for whom the welfare and training of his soldiers was always close to his heart.
>
> Everywhere, we had heard the same tale: the crisis in the east was at its sharpest.[342]

One of the first orders sent out by Hindenburg to his subordinates was for troops to convert their current positions into permanent defences. In many cases, this did not add much to the defensive value of the front line, but it sent out a strong message: there was to be no retreat from these positions. As the first week of August passed, there were unmistakable signs that a new attack was coming: Russian artillery began to 'range in' on targets; reconnaissance flights spotted large troop movements, and wireless intercepts continued to provide detailed information on the location and movement of Russian formations. Both sides launched limited local attacks in attempts to improve their positions without any significant success. German and Austro-Hungarian troops were reshuffled to free up local reserves, and several Hungarian formations were withdrawn entirely and dispatched to their homeland – the growing likelihood of Romanian entry into the war meant that steps had to be taken to prevent a Romanian invasion of Hungarian territory.

Almost inevitably, Brusilov encountered last-minute delays. Bezobrazov's artillery was not ready on time, and on 6 August the commander of the Special Army asked for a postponement of the start date by one day. Brusilov had no choice but to agree. On 7 August, Lesh attacked the positions of the Austro-Hungarian 53rd Infantry Division; although his troops succeeded in penetrating into the first line of trenches, determined counterattacks threw them back. Before dawn the next day, fighting extended to other sectors. Artillery fire from the guns of Third Army pounded the lines of *Gruppe Bernhardi* for much of the day, with several probing infantry attacks being beaten off. The main assault came towards evening and fighting continued through the night; in a few locations, the Russians succeeded in securing segments of the first line and beat off attempts to drive them back, but were unable to widen or deepen their penetrations. After a pause on the morning of 9 August, the Russians tried again during the afternoon but failed to make any impression on the defences. After suffering heavy losses, the Russians were unable to sustain their assaults, and Bernhardi ordered his subordinates to rotate troops out of the front line – one of the hard-learned lessons of the war was that even the best troops would reach breaking point if they were not given adequate rest and shelter.

Andrei Lobanov-Rostovsky, a Russian officer, tried to describe the artillery fire of both sides before the attacks:

> It is impossible to convey in words, but everyone who has experienced it will know what I mean. Perhaps the best way to describe it is to compare it with a constant, powerful earthquake mixed with thunder and lightning, whilst at the same time a crazy giant amuses itself by lighting hundreds of fires. I lay there in my dugout and tried spasmodically to think and do what was expected of me.[343]

Bezobrazov's artillery was finally ready at first light on 8 August to commence its preparatory bombardment. Alfred Knox wrote an account of the assault by the Russian Guards in his memoirs, describing in detail the manner in which the attack was carried out:

> The 64 battalions of I Guards Corps and I Corps were opposed, as far as is known, by only nine German battalions in addition to 41st *Honvéd* Infantry Division.
>
> The enemy's front line was in a thick wood, and his movements were completely hidden. His line projected in a salient southwest of the village of Kukhari. I Guards Corps was detailed to attack the northeast face of this salient … and I Corps the southeast face … Scattered trees afforded some cover to I Corps, but I Guards Corps had to attack across open ground. The latter corps approached its front line to a distance varying from 60 to 400 paces from the edge of the wood on the night of 6–7 August.
>
> Each Guards infantry division detailed two regiments for the attack …
>
> Each of the four four-battalion regiments detailed for the immediate attack had two battalions in [the] front line, one in [the] second line and one in regimental reserve. The battalions in front had each two companies in [the] firing-line and two

companies in support. Each of the companies in the firing-line was extended in four successive waves of one section each, the first section being preceded by grenadiers and sappers to clear such of the wire as might have escaped the artillery.

We had no plans of the enemy's defences, and only the vaguest idea of the position of his batteries, for our airmen had been unable to venture over the enemy's lines in their inferior machines. We were ignorant of the shape and extent of the wood the enemy occupied, for our maps were last corrected 19 years ago, the Russian general staff having never anticipated that the army would be called upon to fight so far east.

The artillery preparation commenced at 6am and continued methodically until noon, when commanders were asked to report on the state of the enemy's wire. The general opinion was that more time was required. Potocki, the division commander, was nervous, but did his best to conceal it. We sat at a little table … He drew himself on the table pictures of ladies, clothed and unclothed. When the time came to give the order, and he realised the difficulty of the task set the infantry, he said to me: 'Now comes the weighty responsibility of the division commander.' However, Rilsky [the division's chief of staff] telephoned the Grand Duke, and received the order to postpone the attack until 5pm.

I returned from a visit to Yanovka just before five. The excitement was intense, but we could see nothing. Rilsky took out his watch and said to Potocki: 'It is time for prayer.' Potocki went to his dugout, followed by most of his staff. Rilsky went to the telegraph dugout.

The first reports came from the artillery observation posts – that the Grenadierski were in the wood, then that the Izmailovski were, then that the Moskovski were. Then we heard from regiments, and they began to blame each other. The Moskovski reported that they could not establish touch with the Grenadierski; later the Grenadierski that the Moskovski were not advancing. On the right the Semenovski Regiment reported to the staff of 1st Division that 71st Division on its right was hanging back – a statement that was probably accurate, as that division had only 300 casualties.

Things, however, appeared to be going well. The observation post reported that 'a great crowd of prisoners' was being sent back. We sat down to supper in high spirits. Then the prisoners arrived – 103 of them under a Grenadierski guard – as sorry a looking lot as one could wish to see!

Potocki was beside himself and went to meet them, cackling like one demented. He kissed the first man of the escort four times on each cheek, and then commenced repeating the performance with the next man, a particularly dirty individual who said he had taken ten men to his own bat.

> The Pavlovski Regiment was ordered forward and placed at the disposal of the OC Grenadierski Regiment. Rilsky and I rode home to corps headquarters satisfied, for the reserves on the spot seemed ample.
>
> At 4.30am on the 9th, Baranovsky was called to the telephone by Zankevich, the chief of staff of 2nd Guards Division, and he returned to tell me that the Moskovsky Regiment had retired from the wood.
>
> At 9am the Grenadierski Regiment retired as well.[344]

Knox went on to describe the reasons for the failure to press home the attack:

> There was some talk of the superiority of the German artillery, but the Russian guns fired six shells to the German guns' one during the preliminary bombardment. The Russian infantry certainly reached the wood, and once it was there, it was thought it would be able to maintain itself against the counterattacks of much inferior forces.
>
> Guards officers laid the blame on their neighbours. They said that the failure of 71st Infantry Division to attack uncovered their right, and 22nd Infantry Division on their left did not assault to its front but followed the left Guards regiment, the Grenadierski, like a flock of sheep, avoiding the Germans who were thus allowed to continue their hold on the southern edge of the wood.
>
> I lunched with the commander of 71st Infantry Division, who was an old friend, on August 9th. He had watched the assault from his observation post a mile in rear of the line, and he said that the right Guards regiment, the Semenoski, like his own regiments, was prevented by the German artillery fire from entering the wood at all. He had slept in this post on the night of the 8th, and 'the night had been perfectly quiet.'
>
> As far as we could ascertain, the losses in this futile attack on the Kukhari Wood were: 71st Infantry Division, 300; 1st Guards Infantry Division, 1,500; 2nd Guards Infantry Division, 4,000; 22nd Infantry Division, 1,000.
>
> It was humiliating to think that the splendid Guardsmen, physically the finest human animals in Europe and all of the best military age, were driven back by such weedy specimens as the German prisoners we had seen.
>
> Bezobrazov told me that he had specially ordered subordinate commanders to regard the edge of the wood as the objective. He read me his instructions on the subject, which were certainly not repeated in corps, divisional or regimental orders.
>
> *Stavka* blamed Bezobrazov. The General Quartermaster told me that when he read Bezobrazov's instructions, he knew that the attack would not succeed, for

> they were rather a treatise on the attack of woods in general than definite orders for the attack of this particular wood …
>
> Only a small fraction of the overwhelming Russian force available was actually used. The attack of 71st Infantry Division was a farce. 1st Guards Division only used five out of its 16 battalions, and 2nd Guards Division only eight out of its 16. The OC Grenadierski made no use of the Pavlovski Regiment which had been placed at his disposal. He explained that the regiment was unable to move forward owing to the heavy enemy barrage – an excuse which carries no weight in view of the description given to me by the GOC 71st Infantry Division of an 'absolutely quiet night'.
>
> A large number of company commanders were killed or wounded; for instance, in the Grenadierski Regiment, ten out of 16, in the Moskovski Regiment, six. The Russian soldier requires leading more than any soldier in the world, and especially in wood fighting. Under the rules in force, only two officers per company went into action with the men, the remainder staying behind with the regimental reserve and going forward to replace casualties. They could not get forward in time.[345]

This account highlights many of the failings of the pre-war doctrine that had been imposed upon the Guards divisions during their lengthy time away from the front line. Whilst the practice of holding officers in the rear and using them as battle casualty replacements might have been sensible in previous conflicts, the confusion of the battlefield and widespread shelling of rear areas made it almost impossible to carry out such policies in 1916. The division of attacking formations into waves and reserves was in itself a reasonable policy, but it required timely communication so that those reserves could intervene quickly, yet there was little attempt to bring forward reserves, whether they were local or from parent formations. It is also striking that the commander of 71st Infantry Division watched the attack from a dugout that was sufficiently far forward for him to observe events directly, whereas the commander of the Guards division relied entirely on messages from the front line.

The defenders – much of the German 107th Infantry Division and all of the Hungarian 41st *Honvéd* Infantry Division – had suffered substantial losses in the Russian bombardment and initial attack, but with the aid of German reinforcements they counterattacked with force, driving back the exhausted Russian Guards. Despite the fact that they had used only a modest portion of the troops available, the Guards made little effort to attack again.

The attack of the neighbouring II Guards Corps was equally ineffective. It was directed against the Austro-Hungarian 29th Infantry Division and the

German 121st Infantry Division and commenced with a prolonged artillery bombardment on 8 August. When the attack came, it was once more in the form of dense infantry formations, which were smashed by defensive fire.[346] Immediately to the south, the Russian XXIII Corps from Kaledin's Eighth Army shed its blood in a similarly futile manner, and was forced to limit its activity to harassing attacks in the following days. Kaledin also attacked the centre of Tersztyánsky's army on 8 August and here, at least, there were initial successes, with the Russian XL Corps succeeding in breaking into the positions of the Austro-Hungarian 13th Rifle Division. The initial counterattack could only bring the Russian advance to a halt, but a more powerful drive on 9 August recovered all of the lost positions.

Winogradsky's 14th Infantry Division was also involved in this assault. He later wrote that he had misgivings about the plans from the outset, which called for a different timescale for the preparatory bombardment:

> The two-hour preparatory fire period was odd; too short to carry out systematic demolition of the enemy's positions, and too long to allow for a surprise attack. We had established the presence of German infantry in front of Shelvov, and owing to their tenacity a prolonged and intense preparation was required to degrade their morale … The enemy was strongly entrenched and had probably prepared unpleasant surprises for us in the woodland, for example barbed wire and machine-gun nests hidden under cover; but in return, we could see clearly the trenches at the edge of the woods from our observation posts …
>
> After experiencing the losses of the preceding actions, the regiments of 14th Infantry Division had a reduced effective strength and were suffering from great physical and moral fatigue after two months of uninterrupted labour. Most of the old officers and soldiers had been killed or wounded and replaced by personnel who did not have the same level of skill or the same solidity.[347]

When the attack began on 8 August, 14th Infantry Division did not enjoy the same unqualified success as it had in previous assaults:

> Exactly at 7am, the 55th Regiment attacked with admirable energy and in a few minutes passed the enemy's first line and at some points reached the second line. To the right, the light infantry of the 4th Infantry Division also started very well and we were already anticipating the same success as that of 28 July, when a series of setbacks brought us up short. The 55th and the light infantry did not have a chance to secure the captured ground; they were counterattacked

> with vigour. Profiting from the woodland and the broken ground close to Shelvov, the enemy deployed his reserves out of sight of our observers and succeeded in turning the right flank of the 55th, first halting it and then driving it back to its start line. The 54th had not approached close enough to the enemy under cover of darkness and delayed its attack, hence its failure. And as for the 56th, for some time we could not determine its progress through the 'square wood' and in any event it did not hold on for long and was forced to retreat. In summary, the attack failed.
>
> During the afternoon, after fresh preparatory bombardment, reserves were brought forward and attacked but with the same outcome. The 'square wood' as it was known proved to be full of machine-gun nests in its depth, some distance from the edge and invisible to our artillery. These machine-guns stopped the 56th and inflicted heavy losses on the 54th from their flanking fire. In general, the Germans had positioned their machine-guns well and they were invulnerable to our 76mm guns, and wreaked great havoc. In such conditions, good preparatory bombardment would have required a full day, with aircraft and 155mm howitzers and not just the 76mm and 120mm guns.
>
> A few days later, the army commander [Kaledin] visited us, coming in person to investigate the causes of our setback. General Kaledin appeared tired, preoccupied and unhappy, but listened very attentively to our explanations all the same and left content.[348]

Although they did not know it, the German and Austro-Hungarian troops had defeated the last major Russian attempt to reach Kovel. In the days that followed, Linsingen, Hindenburg and Ludendorff felt confident enough to start transferring troops to other sectors. In particular, the Turkish XV Corps had been offered by Turkey to help reinforce the threatened front, and despite the Turks' lack of experience in the sort of fighting that they might expect, their help was gratefully accepted. Now, the first of the Turkish troops that had begun to arrive in Kovel were dispatched as reinforcements for Archduke Karl's army group; there was a general belief that the relative ease with which Brusilov's renewed offensive had been stopped meant that the crisis in the centre of the Eastern Front had probably passed.

This redeployment of troops from one sector to another was precisely what Brusilov had tried to prevent with his policy of simultaneous widespread attacks, but Alexeyev had insisted on concentrating forces at specific locations. Aware of the shortcomings of the officers of the Guards Army, Brusilov had attempted to make changes, but had been overruled:

> As commander of the [Southwest] Front I had the power to remove the commanders of armies, corps and all lower-level army formations, but the officers of the Guards were beyond my reach. The tsar himself chose, appointed and dismissed them, so it was impossible for me to make immediate changes to several Guards officers. Whilst I was exchanging confidential letters with Alexeyev, the chairman of the state Duma [Mikhail] Rodzianko arrived and asked permission to visit the front, specifically the Special Army. On his way back, he sent me a letter in which he stated that all the Guards were beside themselves with anger, their commander was not capable of managing them at such a crucial time and the troops did not have confidence in him, and he was terribly upset that they had suffered futile losses without gaining any military glory for themselves and for Russia. I forwarded this letter to Alexeyev asking him to advise the tsar that this state of affairs was intolerable and that instead of appointing favourites to this army, it required the best commanders who had already shown their abilities during the war.[349]

The problem that both Brusilov and Alexeyev faced, however, was that there was a marked shortage of senior Russian officers who had distinguished themselves during the war to date. Nevertheless, the Guards had historically been amongst the most loyal elements of the tsar's armies. The widespread mood amongst the soldiers that they had been badly led – and in particular, had been badly led by officers appointed personally by the tsar – would have serious repercussions. With regard to the question of whether it was better to follow Brusilov's preference for widespread attacks in the expectation that one or other would succeed, or Alexeyev's desire to concentrate on just a few locations, there were arguments in favour of both. Brusilov had demonstrated the efficacy of his tactics earlier in the summer, but at the same time had found it impossible to move reinforcements quickly to the areas of success. However, Alexeyev's preference required far more detailed preparation than was generally the case – the only commander on either side who had succeeded in concentrating his forces in one location for a decisive attack was Mackensen, and every attempt to emulate his successes had failed.

Even before the fruitless assaults north and west of Lutsk, Sakharov's army had renewed its attacks further south. V Siberian Corps attacked along the railway line running from Brody to Lemberg on 4 August, with XVII and VII Corps supporting the attack to the south. Crossings were secured over the upper Styr, despite determined counterattacks. The reserves of the Austro-Hungarian IV Corps were ordered to attack along the line of the river the following day to roll up the bridgehead the Russians had established; whilst this may have looked like a good plan on paper, it ignored the reality of swampy ground in the approach and assembly areas for the counterattack, and by the time the reserves had taken up positions, the Russians had deepened their penetration. Similarly, troops dispatched to the threatened sector from South Army were delayed by poor road conditions and were not able to attack until early on 5 August. Meanwhile, Sakharov had brought forward sufficient reserves to renew his attack and by the afternoon had completely overrun the defensive line west of Załośce. The assault had been aimed deliberately at the seam between IV and V Corps, with the expectation that the Austro-Hungarian formations would then retreat on diverging axes, thus creating a gap that Sakharov could exploit. At the same moment, the centre of IV Corps gave way, and the entire front of Böhm-Ermolli's army looked as if it might disintegrate, especially when the local reserves were committed and swept away by the Russian onslaught.

Late on 5 August, help began to arrive in the shape of a few battalions of German *Landsturm* under the command of the 63-year-old Generalleutnant Theodor Melior, who had been recalled from retirement at the beginning of the war. Böhm-Ermolli now gave him command of the battered and intermingled formations of the northern part of IV Corps. Early on 6 August, a sharp local counterattack succeeded in driving the Russians back a little, just far enough to restore a continuous defensive line, but Sakharov's subordinates were moving forward supplies and reinforcements and once these were in place, they attacked again during the afternoon. The first assault was directed at the southern flank of V Corps, and bitter fighting raged throughout the day with units from both sides rapidly losing any regimental or battalion structure; energetic officers simply took command of the men around them and did the best they could. At first, the Russians had the advantage, seizing the village of Trościanec and the high ground to the west, but as darkness fell, the front line was back to where it had started the day. A little to the south, the Austro-Hungarian IV Corps came under pressure in both its centre and its northern flank and suffered further heavy losses. As IV Corps was driven back, Bothmer had no alternative but to order his northern flank to withdraw to the west in order to ensure that contact was retained.

In the midst of this growing crisis, Conrad put in a rare appearance. Ever since the war began, he had stayed at *AOK*, initially in Przemyśl and then in Teschen, apart from visits to Berlin and Vienna; his failure to visit the armies under his control was a considerable factor in the manner in which he repeatedly drew up plans that took little account of difficulties of terrain, logistics and other local issues. Now, he visited Archduke Karl and Böhm-Ermolli in Lemberg. After an exchange of messages with Hindenburg, he was able to confirm the dispatch of the German 195th and 197th Infantry Divisions to Second Army under the command of General Johannes von Eben, who had extensive experience of fighting on the Eastern Front, having taken part in the capture of Ostrolenka, Bialystok and Vilna in 1915. The two divisions were newly organised formations, formed from a mixture of pre-existing independent brigades and regiments and reservist drafts; nevertheless, they represented substantial and welcome reinforcements in a moment of emergency.[350]

Fortunately for the Central Powers, Sakharov was facing difficulties of his own. His army had been badly degraded by the fighting of previous weeks, and in particular XXXII Corps was too weak to be thrown into the battle. The best that Sakharov could do was send a single brigade to VII Corps, and his request for help from Seventh Army to the south was rejected; Shcherbachev claimed that he had only a single regiment available as army reserve, and was unwilling to release this. The formations in the front line did their best, but they had lost too many men to drive the mixed Austro-Hungarian and German forces back any further. As was so often the case, the presence of even modest numbers of German units seemed to encourage the *k.u.k.* troops to fight harder, and the arrival of Eben's divisions allowed a counterattack that rapidly restored the front line. Another opportunity, created at great cost, had been missed while reinforcements were organised and supplies brought forward. On 10 August, Sakharov tried again, and an assault on the lines of the Austro-Hungarian 14th Infantry Division made an early breakthrough, but the troops of the German 197th Infantry Division mounted a counterattack that slowly ground the Russians back towards their start line. The following day, there were heavy attacks against the northern flank of South Army, but they too resulted in little change in the front line.

In Galicia, where Archduke Karl had planned his offensive along the Dniester only to find repeatedly that the designated troops were required elsewhere, Lechitsky attacked again on 7 August with his main effort directed at the front line to the south of the river. Many of the assaults foundered in the face of defensive fire, but the Russian infantry succeeded in achieving penetrations to the east and southeast of Stanislau. By the end of the day, Kövesz had no more reserves left and was forced to order Third Army to pull back, a withdrawal that proved to be difficult due to the close contact of the Russian forces. On 8 August, Lechitsky surged forward again and the front line moved steadily closer to Stanislau over the next two days. Finally, despite the arrival of a trickle of German forces as reinforcements, Kövesz ordered the abandonment of the town, which passed into Russian hands at dawn on 11 August. North of the Dniester, Shcherbachev had also attacked, but had made less impressive progress;

nevertheless, Bothmer's South Army was forced to pull back its southern flank to keep contact with the retreating *k.u.k.* Third Army.

Over the next few days, Kövesz ordered further withdrawals south of Stanislau, and Bothmer too had to pull back towards the west. However, at no point did the Russians come close to threatening a further collapse. The long weeks of fighting since early June had cost Brusilov's armies over half a million casualties, and despite the reinforcements that Alexeyev had assigned, it was not possible to continue with the sort of pressure required to break through the defences, particularly as they were now generally stiffened by the presence of German troops. As more German troops arrived, Conta's *Karpatenkorps* was able to attack the southern flank of Lechitsky's army in the second week of August and made slow and unspectacular progress through the difficult terrain. Nevertheless, Lechitsky felt sufficiently threatened that he diverted troops to the south, thus weakening the forces available for any further thrust towards the west.

Events elsewhere began to exert an influence. In addition to the growing threat of Romanian involvement in the war, Conrad had to cope with Italian successes on the Isonzo front. Attacking on 6 August, the Italians secured a bridgehead over the River Isonzo and captured the town of Gorizia, the failed objective of previous assaults. Although Italian losses, estimated at over 51,000, were greater than those of the *k.u.k.* Army, Conrad was aware that he could not afford to switch any further troops from the Alps to the east, placing him even more in debt to the Germans. This in turn diverted more German strength from the Western Front, thus undermining Falkenhayn's strategy of achieving a decisive victory on what he regarded as the crucial front. The Russian attacks might be faltering, but in conjunction with the Italian, British and French assaults, the grand strategy that Joffre had outlined in Chantilly in 1915 of overwhelming German and Austro-Hungarian forces by simultaneous offensives did seem to have achieved its intention of preventing the Central Powers from moving troops from one sector to another. Sadly for the Entente Powers, this was only achieved at the cost of thousands of Russian lives, and Alexeyev's armies were now too weakened to continue to exert pressure in the manner of June.

CHAPTER 10

THE ADVENT OF ROMANIA

On 9 August, Brusilov called a halt to the attempts to bludgeon a path to Kovel. The Guards divisions, committed to the offensive with such confidence, had lost over 54,000 men for almost no gain, and losses in Southwest Front as a whole were rapidly approaching the one million mark.[351] After one attack, German field commanders suggested that it might be wise to negotiate a short truce to clear away the fallen; Marwitz refused, on the grounds that the sight of so many dead Russians would damage the morale of the enemy and would make fresh waves of attackers hesitate.[352] The failure to reach Kovel led to further changes in command. The Special Army was removed from Southwest Front's remit and passed to West Front, along with Third Army, and continued to batter away at the Stochod line with no further gains. The criticisms of Bezobrazov by Brusilov and also from Rodzianko also had an effect, but as ever the change in command of the Special Army was an involved business.

The starting point appears to have been Bezobrazov's decision to try to have Grand Duke Pavel removed from command of I Guards Corps. On 13 August, Bezobrazov confided in his friend Alfred Knox that he had decided to ask the tsar to approve the change in command. The following day, Knox noted that Dmitri Pavlovich, the son of Grand Duke Pavel, passed through Rojishche – the town where Bezobrazov's headquarters was located – with a bundle of documents, headed for *Stavka*. Suspecting that something was afoot, and that Grand Duke Pavel was seeking to pre-empt any move against him, Bezobrazov immediately dispatched his aide-de-camp with his own recommendation for the dismissal of the grand duke, and a month later Knox gave an account of events:

> Rodzianko [Bezobrazov's aide-de-camp, who had the same surname as Mikhail Rodzianko, the statesman who had visited the front and come away with bad

> reports of the leadership of the Guards] gives amusing accounts of the developments in the Guard. He travelled in amity with the Grand Duke [Dimitri Pavlovich] to *Stavka*. On arrival at Mogilev station they found that the tsarina had arrived on a visit, and the tsar was with her in her carriage. Dimitri Pavlovich was therefore prevented from seeing the tsar at once, and Rodzianko took his letter straight to Alexeyev, who sent it on with other papers to the tsar. Two days later, at lunch, the tsar told Rodzianko to tell Bezobrazov that he was satisfied with him and with the Guard, but that he was to be sparing of life, as he was fond of his Guard.
>
> Rodzianko returned to Rojishche in triumph, but five days after his arrival Bezobrazov's orderly suddenly came to tell him that he must prepare to leave with his general at once. They packed up and went to *Stavka*. There Bezobrazov told Rodzianko that the tsar kissed him and told him to take six weeks' leave before returning to his command. Bezobrazov went to Petrograd, and Rodzianko to Rojishche to collect kit.[353]

It seems that the original intention of Tsar Nicholas was to send Bezobrazov on leave and then to assign him to command of a corps of the Guards, but instead it was decided to retire Bezobrazov from front line service completely. Letters had been circulating in Petrograd making allegations about Bezobrazov's competence and honesty, and one such letter was forwarded to Nicholas on 7 August, even as the disastrous attacks were unfolding.[354] Just three days later, the tsar wrote to his wife:

> Yesterday evening I received Kyrill, who has returned from the Guards, where he spent six days. He saw many commanders and officers, and they all told him the same about old Bezobrazov, what you already know, so that today I spoke to Alexeyev on the subject and told him that I wished to dismiss B. He of course agreed with me that it would be better to remove him and appoint a good general. We were both considering with whom to replace him.[355]

It should be remembered that the tsar had chosen 'old Bezobrazov' himself to take command of the Guards. However, the tide had clearly turned against Bezobrazov even before Rodzianko and Dimitri Pavlovich travelled to Mogilev.

There then arose the question of who should replace Bezobrazov. One of the few rising stars of the Russian Army was Vasili Iosifovich Gurko, currently commander of Fifth Army in the north, and he was now summoned to *Stavka*. He had recently been involved in abortive discussions about an offensive in Latvia, involving both an assault on the heavily fortified German lines and the disembarkation of two divisions of infantry on the Courland peninsula to the northwest of Riga, in an attempt to outflank the German defences. To undertake such a complex operation with troops and shipping that had no prior experience of such operations would have been risky in the extreme, and the project was raised and dropped on more than one occasion, the latest being at the same time that the ineffectual Kuropatkin was removed from office as commander of Northern Front. However, Kuropatkin's replacement was not a man to inspire confidence – it was Nikolai Ruzsky, who had already commanded Northern Front and had singularly failed to impress on any occasion. Even as Gurko was settling down to such changes, he was summoned to Mogilev, where he had discussions with the tsar and Alexeyev. It seems that the decision to appoint Gurko as the new commander of the Special Army was made at this meeting, though it was nearly the end of the month before Alexeyev telegraphed Gurko to offer him the post. His replacement as commander of Fifth Army was Vladimir Alexeyevich Sluysarenko.

As soon as he arrived to take command of the Special Army, Gurko made use of the dispensation he had been given by Tsar Nicholas to remove many Guards staff officers from their posts, starting with the chief of staff of the Guards, Count Alexei Nikolayevich Ignatiev, who was the first man to meet him on his arrival:

> I frankly told Count Ignatiev that in spite of all his qualities as a soldier and a man, he was unable to undertake this post; after passing the Academy of the General Staff, he had served in the ranks, and only during the war had he occupied a post on the staff. Certainly everyone could learn, but it was necessary to avoid learning when it might be paid for with human lives.[356]

A tour of the front line held by the Guards rapidly revealed to Gurko what others had already discovered: the terrain was singularly unsuitable for an attack, particularly given the failure of those who had spent the previous months training the Guards to take into account any of the lessons that had been learned so bloodily since August 1914. Gurko advised Brusilov and Alexeyev of his findings, stating that it was futile to continue trying to attack towards Kovel. All formations were badly degraded by their losses, and the confidence and vigour that victory had brought in the first half of June was now gone. Somewhat reluctantly, Brusilov agreed and turned his attention to forcing a way through to Władimir Wołynsk through the Austro-Hungarian Fourth Army. But the moment was gone; when Kaledin attacked – even with the Guards, who had been loaned to him for the purpose – he failed to make any progress. In early July, such an attack, with or without the Guards, would almost certainly have succeeded, and would have opened a route of approach to Kovel from the south that was far more straightforward than the marshy terrain of the Stochod valley.

The growing resistance of the Central Powers, largely due to a combination of more German troops and Russian casualties, brought Brusilov's offensive to a stuttering end. Attacks continued on until the autumn rains turned the roads to mud, but other than add to the already terrible casualty list, nothing was achieved. The final assault – made under the aegis of Gurko's Special Army – took place in mid-October. Knox summarised the futile battles:

> The failure of Kaledin's and Gurko's offensive to the west from Lutsk was as complete as that of Bezobrazov on the Stochod. In almost every attack the Russian infantry reached the enemy's second and third line of trench, but was shelled out and lost heavily in retiring through his barrage. General Khanjin, who as Inspector of Artillery of the Eighth Army was responsible for the first attacks, maintained that the Russian guns did all that could be expected of them. They cut the enemy's wire and made his trenches untenable. They could not fight his batteries because they had no aeroplanes to tell them where they were. He said the attacks had come to nothing because the troops were worn out and had lost most of their good officers. General Smislovsky, who as Inspector of Artillery in the Special Army directed the guns in the later attacks, said that the first attempts failed because the batteries were detailed to combat the enemy's batteries, and the later attacks collapsed because the infantry had lost heart.[357]

Towards the end of October, Knox visited the front line in the sector where Kaledin had attacked with so much success in June:

> I … drove in a car to Lutsk.
>
> It was a foggy and wet day and the whole country is a scene of desolation. The local inhabitants apparently do not believe in the permanency of the Russian success, for only soldiers were to be seen, there is no cultivation, and no attempt to rebuild ruined houses.
>
> I found the staff of the Special Army in the monastery that the Eighth Army occupied in August. All swear by Gurko.
>
> The little man talked to me for a long time in his broken English, speaking very correctly, but slowly, and often at a loss for words. He agreed that it had been a mistake on the part of the front to send the Guards to the Stochod, where only a small local success was possible. When our main strength was moved to the

> Władimir Wołynsk road it was already too late, for the enemy had brought up his heavy batteries. Gurko said that he is now only attacking to prevent the enemy transferring troops to Romania. Brusilov wanted to stop the attacks a week ago, but allowed them to continue until today. However, today's attack has been postponed on account of the fog.
>
> The Germans have hung a notice to the effect that the kaiser will give Brusilov an Iron Cross if he penetrates their front. There was a proposal to reply that the tsar would give the kaiser a St George if he broke through the Russian front, but a wag suggested that they had better not, as 'perhaps the Germans might really try!' However, Gurko does not fear an enemy offensive …
>
> I hear whispers that the Russian infantry has lost heart and that anti-war propaganda is rife in the ranks. It is little wonder that they are downhearted after being driven to the slaughter over the same ground seven times in about a month, and every time taking trenches where their guns could not keep them. However, I do not attach importance to this, for they will be fresh again next spring.[358]

An observation by Hindenburg adds graphically to the sort of images that must have confronted the Russian troops as they hurled themselves forward repeatedly:

> No one knows the figures [for Russian casualties in the war to date]. Five or eight millions? We, too, have no idea. All we know is that sometimes in our battles with the Russians we had to remove the mounds of enemy corpses from before our trenches in order to get a clear field of fire against fresh assaulting waves.[359]

Before the war, Conrad had written extensively that the ability of troops to sustain their efforts depended on their moral strength, a poorly defined combination of numerical strength and their morale. He had argued that troops with high moral strength could sustain far heavier losses, and in this context an army that was winning battles could clearly absorb casualties with far less damage to the fighting spirit of the troops than an army that was being defeated. Whatever truth there was in this concept was effectively proved in Russia in 1916. The initial attacks in June were costly, but the morale of the men remained high as they could clearly see that they had won a tremendous victory. As the weeks rolled by and casualties continued to accumulate, but with far poorer results, morale began to decline.

On the other side of the front line, the crisis had effectively passed by the time that Hindenburg took command, but nevertheless he benefited from the outcome. Just as he had been seen in 1914 as the man who had saved East Prussia at Tannenberg, so he was now credited with defeating the Brusilov Offensive, though – as had been the case at Tannenberg – he had inherited a situation which, though very difficult, was about to improve due to steps that had already been taken. With the Verdun offensive clearly failing to deliver the victory expected, those who pressed for Hindenburg to replace Falkenhayn renewed their efforts.

Some of the Russian officers in Gurko's Special Army cheered themselves with the arrival of General Lavr Georgeyevich Kornilov to take command of XXV Corps. When the Russian line in southern Poland had collapsed in the face of Mackensen's offensive in early May 1915, Kornilov's 48th Infantry Division had been overwhelmed as it attempted to retreat from the western Carpathians and Kornilov had been taken prisoner. However, he had resolved to try to return to Russia, and Knox recounted the story of his escape:

> He was confined to a house with a high wall round it at some small town south of Vienna. He made up his mind from the first to escape as soon as possible. He therefore adopted the surliest attitude towards any Austrians who came to see him, as he did not want to make friends who might become constant visitors and so discover his absence immediately he escaped. The arrangements for the flight were made by Russian soldiers in combination with Czech friends. The general's presence was checked daily at noon when the guard on the house was relieved, but after being formally taken over by the relieving guard he could reasonably count on 24 hours. It was therefore important that he should escape as soon as possible after the change of guard. Just before that hour he dressed in the uniform of an Austrian soldier, covered of course by his Russian greatcoat and cap. At 12.05 he descended the stairs and passed the sentry, and when his back was turned, threw off the greatcoat and cap, handing them to a Russian doctor who was attending him, and who came to meet him by previous arrangement. When the sentry turned at the end of his beat, he was merely an Austrian soldier climbing the wall.
>
> A Czech soldier met him outside, and they went together to the station and slept there until the train arrived. Kornilov was provided with a forged railway pass and also with a certificate – to show in case of necessity – testifying that he was 'Private X, authorised to search for the escaped Russian General Kornilov.'
>
> The fugitives arrived in Budapest the same evening and spent the night in the barracks set apart for travelling soldiers. The Austrian sisters who attended Kornilov thought he was a Transylvanian.
>
> On the following day the companions took train to a station not far from the Romanian frontier. There in a wood they changed their Austrian uniform for

> workmen's dress, which they had carried with them in a bundle. Kornilov passed fifteen more days on foot before he succeeded in crossing the Romanian frontier. The hunger they both suffered was too much for the Czech's prudence, and going to a village to search for food he was captured by gendarmes and shot. Kornilov occasionally purchased food from Romanian houses, but the last three days before passing the frontier he lived on berries only. He lay out two nights on the rocks on the frontier studying the beat of the Austrian patrols, and crossed on the third night. He had a map and a compass. As the nights, however, were cloudy, he could get little help from the stars, and it was dangerous to strike matches to consult the map. He said that his sense of direction, fostered by long travel in Mongolia, helped him.[360]

The extraordinary tale of Kornilov's escape tells as much about the Russian general's resourcefulness and determination as it does about the Ruritanian world inhabited by so many in the Austro-Hungarian Empire; even if Kornilov was dressed as an Austrian soldier, it is astonishing that the sentry in the house south of Vienna did not question why a man in Austrian uniform was trying to climb the wall. The cooperation of the Czech soldier in the escape highlights yet again the nationalist and ethnic strains within the empire.

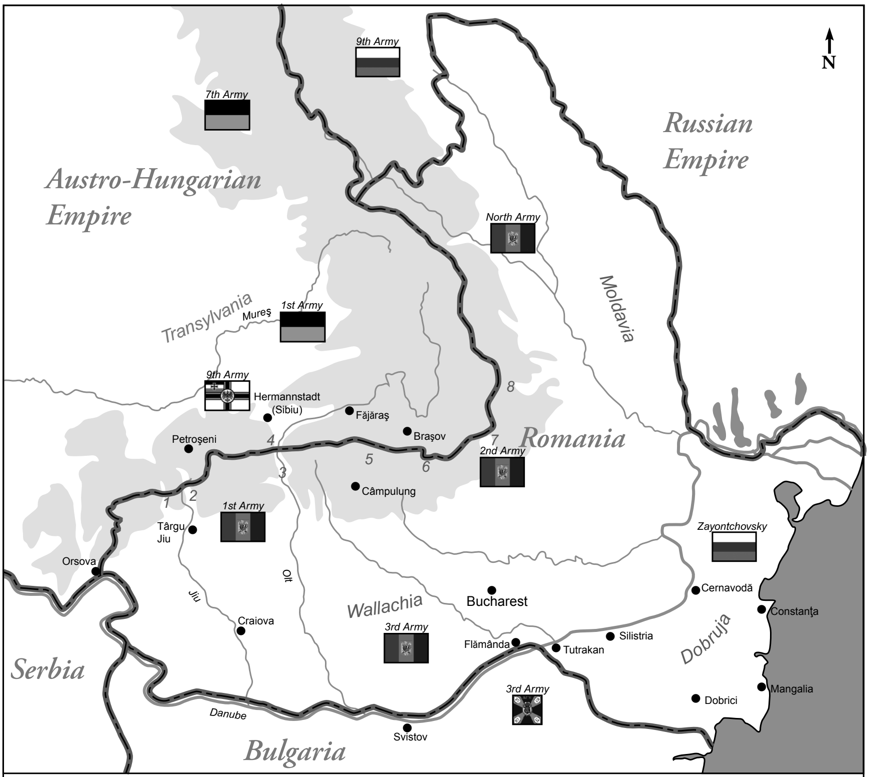
Throughout the summer – indeed, for much of the war – the Russians had hoped and expected that Romania would join the Entente Powers, creating a new front in Transylvania. This would greatly extend the front line that surrounded the Central Powers; whilst Romania would be able to furnish half a million soldiers for this new sector, the Central Powers would have to spread their existing resources even thinner, creating the increasing likelihood of a breakthrough elsewhere. However, securing the support of Romania had proved to be a complex business.

As has been already described, King Carol of Romania had been determined to keep his nation out of the conflict. As a member of the Hohenzollern family, he felt a clear loyalty to his relation, the kaiser, but the strain of reconciling his personal beliefs – constantly bolstered by the ambassadors of Germany and Austria-Hungary – with the strong desire of many within Romania for a war with the Dual Monarchy had added greatly to his ill-health and probably hastened his death in October 1914; it is likely that he was already preparing to abdicate when he passed away. His successor was his nephew Ferdinand, a complex figure. In private, he was articulate and knowledgeable, but he was not gifted with social graces, and was often perceived as dull and inept by those who did not know him well.[361] The contrast with his dominating, outspoken, and passionate wife Marie was striking, and unlike Carol he did not try to restrain the pro-Entente factions within Romania, stating that it was his intention to rule exclusively in the interests of the Romanian people.

Much as Hitler's early foreign policy was dominated by what many Germans saw as the plight of German populations under the rule of other nations, Romanian public opinion was strongly influenced by a desire to unite all ethnic Romanians in a greater Romanian kingdom. There were Romanian populations in the neighbouring parts of Russian Bessarabia, but the greatest number of 'oppressed' Romanians lay to the northwest in Transylvania, currently part of the Kingdom of Hungary. Prime Minister Ion Brătianu started a long diplomatic campaign aimed at securing the annexation of all Romanian-populated territories almost as soon as the war began, treading a careful path between avoiding alienation of the Central Powers whilst trying to secure adequate guarantees from the Entente Powers. He was a naturally cautious man, steeped in Machiavelli and Borgia, and strongly identified his nation's struggles with those of the Italian unification movement, seeing the main obstacle as the Austro-Hungarian Empire, whose destruction would allow Transylvania to become part of Romania. With the tacit consent of the new king, he effectively ran Romania's foreign affairs, negotiating directly with emissaries from other nations and effectively ignoring the Romanian foreign ministry – within a short time, the minister of foreign affairs, Emanuel Porumbaru, was widely derided in Romanian society as 'the minister foreign to affairs'.[362]

The history of the Balkan region since the decline of the Ottoman Empire is full of clashes over ethnicity, nationality and religion. The problem that has arisen repeatedly is that whilst one particular group may dominate a region, it is unusual for that group to be the only one living in that area. In the case of Transylvania, for example, the majority of the population was ethnically Romanian, but there were also substantial Saxon German and Hungarian minorities – in some towns and villages, they actually formed a majority. However, Brătianu had no intention of getting caught up in detailed and intricate map-drawing exercises to protect those who were not Romanian; throughout his endeavours, he was dedicated purely to furthering the interests of those he identified as Romanians, regardless of the wishes or aspirations of others who might be living with them in the same areas.[363]

There were no illusions that Romania was ideologically committed to the Entente cause; Sazonov, the Russian foreign minister, had advised the tsar before the war began in 1914 that 'Romania will try to join the side which proved to be the strongest and which is in a position to promise the greatest profits.'[364] Once war began, the cautious Brătianu had worked assiduously to prevent more


N
9th Army
7th Army
Russian Empire
Austro-Hungarian Empire
North Army
Moldavia
Transylvania
Mureş
1st Army
9th Army
Hermannstadt (Sibiu)
Făgăraş
Braşov
8
Petroşeni
4
7
Romania
2nd Army
5
6
3
Câmpulung
1
2
1st Army
Târgu Jiu
Zayontchovsky
Orsova
Olt
Jiu
Cernavodă
Bucharest
Wallachia
Constanţa
Craiova
3rd Army
Flămânda
Tutrakan
Silistria
Dobruja
Serbia
3rd Army
Mangalia
Dobrici
Danube
Svistov
Bulgaria

Romania, 1916

1 Vulcan Pass
2 Szurduk Pass
3 Red Tower Pass
4 Olt Pass
5 Bran (Törzburger) Pass
6 Predeal (Tömöser) Pass
7 Bodza Pass
8 Oltuz Pass

0 50 miles
0 80km

hotheaded elements in Romania from rushing to war in 1914 when Austro-Hungarian forces were humiliated in Serbia and defeated by the Russians in Galicia. Regardless of the opportunity that might have existed in 1914 for a swift attack into Transylvania, Brătianu judged correctly that Romania's best chances of securing its aims lay in the support of the Entente Powers. This was based to a large extent on bitter experience in 1878, when the Great Powers – gathered at the Congress of Berlin – removed Bessarabia from Romanian control and assigned the province to Russia. Any such high-handed behaviour had to be prevented in future, and the first step to achieving this was a secret treaty with Russia, signed on 1 October 1914, which guaranteed neutrality between the two states in return for Russian support for Romanian annexation of the Romanian-inhabited parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at a future point in time. However, Sazonov had been very careful about the wording of the agreement: Russia would support Romania's right 'to annex the territories of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy which are populated by Romanians by letting their forces occupy them at the moment it deems convenient' – in other words, Romania would only be allowed to annex territories that it occupied, not necessarily territories that had been overrun by Russia. Nor did Russia commit itself to helping the Romanians in such an occupation.[365]

Having secured this first step, Brătianu opened negotiations with the British and French in early 1915 to secure their support. At this stage, he made clear his greater ambitions – in addition to Transylvania, he wished to annex Bukovina (which included the Bessarabian territories lost in 1878), the Banat region that straddled Hungary and Serbia, and parts of Hungary to the north and west of Transylvania itself. Whilst this last element would not have troubled the Entente Powers, they were unwilling to consider Brătianu's other demands, as this would have required territorial concessions on the part of Russia and Serbia. Nevertheless, Brătianu remained adamant and as 1915 failed to produce victory over the Germans – indeed, the year saw Russia almost forced from the war – the Entente Powers had to reconsider. There were no illusions about the war-winning ability of the relatively primitive Romanian Army, but securing Romanian support in the war seemed to take on a life of its own and was assigned an importance out of all proportion with any contribution that Romania might make to the war. As Russia's armies reeled back across Poland in the summer of 1915, there was a tentative offer of acceptance, in return for Romania guaranteeing entry into the war within five weeks. As Brătianu's envoy in Petrograd wrote to Bucharest:

> After Italy entered the war and while the Russians were at the Carpathians, we were told that our help was of no special importance. On the very day when Przemyśl fell [to Mackensen's advancing armies], they let us understand that we might be granted the border along the Pruth and Czernowitz; after Lvov [Lemberg] was evacuated, the rate of concessions escalated; almost on the day of the German occupation of Warsaw, all of the demands were met.[366]

At this stage, Serbia remained unconquered, and it is characteristic of the behaviour of the Great Powers of the early 20th century that they were willing to accommodate Brătianu's demands with respect to Serbian territory without the knowledge, still less the consent, of Belgrade. However, Brătianu refused to make any commitment. The timescale was not in Romania's interests, he insisted, and he rejected a modified proposal that did not include the five-week requirement on the grounds that if any such treaty were to become known to the Central Powers, the consequences would be disastrous for Romania. This was one of the reasons that he had worked so secretly, not even revealing the existence of negotiations to his cabinet until mid-1915.

As the tide seemed to be turning against the Entente, there was even less reason for the immensely cautious Brătianu to make any commitments, and it was increasingly clear to the Entente negotiators that he had played a skilful game, using the British and French to put pressure upon Russia to make concessions. There was growing doubt in the Entente camp about Brătianu's reliability, but there was little option other than to continue trying to win him over. By the summer of 1916, with Brusilov's troops advancing, the Austro-Hungarian offensive against Italy abandoned, and hundreds of thousands of *k.u.k.* troops surrendering after only token resistance, it seemed as if the moment had come. Finally, in early July, Brătianu informed the representatives of the Entente Powers that he was willing to sign a treaty. Detailed negotiations now began about the final terms of the treaty, and in the meantime it was vital to prevent the Central Powers from becoming aware of events. After the fall of Serbia in late 1915, Falkenhayn had met representatives of the Bulgarian general staff and considered whether it might be possible to use the troops in the Balkans against Romania. There were logistic difficulties, and Conrad had already decided to use his troops for an invasion of Montenegro, but in any event Brătianu ensured that Romania agreed to sell food and oil to the Central Powers in the coming winter, effectively removing any *casus belli*.[367] It was important to prevent any military action by the Central Powers, and to this end the Romanians worked assiduously to ensure that the messages received in Vienna and Berlin were ambiguous at best.

Central to this was Ottokar Czernin, the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Bucharest. He had been close to King Carol, and advised his superiors that it was in their interests to make the Romanians a counter-offer – in return for concessions in Transylvania, Romania might be persuaded to join the Central Powers. This was never going to be a palatable suggestion; at various points in their difficult relationship, Conrad and Falkenhayn had made similar suggestions to each other (Falkenhayn had suggested that Vienna should offer Italy territorial concessions to secure Italian neutrality, and Conrad had retaliated by suggesting that Germany should offer to hand back Alsace and Lorraine to France to secure peace), and Czernin cannot have been surprised when István Tisza, the Hungarian prime minister, categorically rejected any suggestion of ceding Transylvania to Romania, concluding one of his pronouncements on the subject with the statement that 'whoever attempts to seize just one square metre of Hungarian soil will be shot.'[368] As 1916 progressed, Czernin assured Vienna that war remained unlikely – Romania's army was not ready, and there were pro-German factions within Romania who would prevent entry into the war. Foremost amongst these, Czernin believed, was King Ferdinand. It is not clear what basis there was for this belief, but he was not alone; Hilmar von dem Bussche, the German ambassador in Bucharest, wrote in late August to Berlin that he believed that Ferdinand would not turn against Germany.[369] The assurances of the two ambassadors were eagerly accepted by many in Berlin and Vienna, where many grabbed at any assurance that it might be possible to avoid adding to the enemies of the Central Powers. Czernin later summed up the views of those to whom he reported:

> The repellent attitude adopted by Hungary may be accounted for in two ways: the Hungarians, to begin with, were averse to giving up any of their own territory, and secondly, they did not believe – even to the very last – that Romania would remain permanently neutral or that sooner or later we would be forced to fight *against* Romania unless we in good time carried her with us. In this connection Tisza always maintained his optimism, and to the very last moment held to the belief that Romania would not dare take it upon herself to attack us. This is the only reason that explains why the Romanians surprised us so much by their invasion of Transylvania and by being able to carry off so much rich booty. I would have been able to take much better care of the many Austrians and Hungarians living in Romania – whose fate was terrible after the declaration of war, which took them also by surprise – if I had been permitted to draw their attention more openly and generally to the coming catastrophe; but in several of his letters Tisza implored me not to create a panic, 'which would bring incalculable consequences with it.' As I neither did, nor could, know how far this secrecy was in agreement with our military counter-preparations, I was bound to observe it. Apparently, Burián [the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister] believed my reports to a certain extent; at any rate, for some time before the declaration of war he ordered all the secret documents and the available money to be conveyed to Vienna, and entrusted to Holland the care of our citizens; but Tisza told me long after that he considered my reports of too pessimistic a tendency, and was afraid to give orders for the *superfluous* evacuation of Transylvania.[370]

Czernin added a nuance to his views about territorial concessions to Romania:

> The Romanians attempted several times to make the maintenance of their *neutrality* contingent on territorial concessions. I was always opposed to this, and

> at the Ballplatz [Foreign Office in Vienna] they were of the same opinion. The Romanians would have appropriated these concessions and simply attacked us later to obtain more. On the other hand, it seemed to me that to gain *military co-operation* a cession of territory would be quite in order, since, once in the field, the Romanians could not draw back and their fate would be permanently bound up with ours.[371]

Others, too, chose to believe any suggestion that Romania would remain neutral, but the signs of increasing military preparation were there for those who chose to see them. Conrad repeatedly drew attention to reports from military intelligence that suggested Romania was moving closer to war. For example, harvest leave was common practice throughout Europe during times of peace, releasing troops to return home to help gather the crops, but from 20 July no such leave was granted. This was followed at the beginning of August by an announcement that the Romanian government would imminently commence requisition of horses, wagons and the few automobiles in private hands in Romania, and instructions that no further leave was to be granted to officers in the army from 4 August. Reservists began to be summoned a day later, and there were reports that the Russians had extended their railway lines towards the Romanian frontier in Moldavia. Oberst Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord, a German officer who was serving in a liaison role with the Bulgarian Army, reported on 11 August that Romania was slowly moving onto a war footing, and correctly identified that the main Romanian concentration would be against Transylvania, and would be complete by the end of the month.[372] In any event, the ciphers used by the Italians had been cracked by the Central Powers in April 1916, and many of the details of Romanian negotiations with the Entente Powers were therefore known in detail, though Czernin suggested that some of the intercepted messages might have been deliberately faked in an attempt to mislead Vienna and Berlin. Nevertheless, many chose to believe that there would be no Romanian declaration of war. Falkenhayn wrote in his memoirs that by July it seemed inevitable that war would come, but at the time he repeatedly played down Conrad's warnings, implying that these were merely further attempts by his Austro-Hungarian counterpart to ensure that even more German troops were sent to the east. Given Romania's predominantly rural economy, Falkenhayn suggested that any Romanian declaration of war would have to wait until after the harvest had been gathered, despite clear evidence that harvest leave had not been granted. Even after his accurate assessment of how long it would take Romania to prepare for an attack into Transylvania, Hammerstein concluded that war was unlikely, writing to Falkenhayn on

21 August that he believed that the Romanian government would fall and be replaced by one that was more friendly to Germany.[373] This in particular seems to have been wildly optimistic, given that not only Brătianu but also most other leading Romanian politicians seemed bent on war. However, it should be pointed out that the Romanians had signed an alliance treaty with Germany before the war; unfortunately for the Central Powers, this treaty remained secret and had never been ratified by the Romanian parliament.

Given the growing evidence of preparations, steps had to be taken for the possible – or as some believed, probable – entry of Romania into the war, and at the end of July a formal agreement was reached between Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and (a few days later) Turkey. It was correctly concluded that Romania would seek to attack Transylvania at the first opportunity, and plans were made accordingly:

> Immediately after the outbreak of hostilities a new army under Mackensen [currently languishing as the commander of the forces of the Central Powers on the Salonika front] was to invade Dobruja from Bulgaria, overrun the Romanian bridgeheads at Tutrakan and Silistria and press forward to the shortest line between the Danube and the Black Sea. It was intended to form this new army from the German 101st Infantry Division, part of which was already in Rustchuk, four Bulgarian divisions (of which three were already in north Bulgaria and one came from Macedonia), and two Turkish divisions from the neighbourhood of Adrianople. General Conrad would have liked the armies to advance at once across the Danube instead of into Dobruja, so as to bring about an earlier relief in Transylvania. The Dobruja plan, however, was kept to, as the crossing of the river was not considered practicable until the Romanian forces in Dobruja had been effectively dealt with. Preparations were made on the German side for the abundant equipment of Mackensen's army with such modern weapons, not yet known to the Romanians, as heavy artillery, mine-throwers and gas. The gradual assembling of men and materiel was to begin as soon as possible, because in view of the inadequacy of the communications in the Balkans, there remained a possibility of their not being able to advance in time. After Mackensen's army had reached the line agreed upon, strong detachments were to be withdrawn from it and sent to Svistov in Bulgaria, where they were to cross the Danube and march on Bucharest. The technical difficulties of a crossing further downstream were thought too great for this to be attempted …
>
> While these operations were being carried out by Field Marshal Mackensen, Austria was to try to hold up the advance of the main Romanian forces over the

> mountains as long as possible until the attacking troops, which were to be dispatched immediately after the declaration of war, had got into position. Germany had provided five infantry and between one and two cavalry divisions to help in this. [*AOK*] intended to send into Transylvania two infantry divisions and one cavalry division, all of which had suffered heavily in the battles on the Eastern Front. On arrival these divisions were to be brought up to full strength and recuperated.[374]

Conrad had proposed a pre-emptive strike against Romania, on the grounds that war was inevitable and such an operation would prevent any invasion of Austro-Hungarian territory, as well as inflicting a war on Romania before it could mobilise fully. Given his previous rejections of Conrad's suggestions it can have come as no surprise to anyone when Falkenhayn turned down such an attack. His reasoning for this was largely on the grounds that Romania would not go to war until the end of the harvest, and in the meantime any troops that might be used in a pre-emptive strike were urgently needed elsewhere.[375]

Negotiations between Romania and the Entente Powers dragged on. Brătianu had already placed difficult territorial demands on the table, and he now added further requirements if Romania was to enter the war. Aware that his army was numerically strong but weak in almost every other respect, he demanded that all the Entente Powers maintained powerful offensives on their respective fronts in order to prevent the Central Powers from concentrating against Romania; in particular, the Russian position in Galicia was to be maintained at all costs. In order to improve the fighting power of the Romanian Army, Brătianu required the Entente Powers to provide regular supplies of weapons, munitions and other *matériel* amounting to 300 tons per day, and in the event of an attack by Bulgaria, Brătianu wanted unconditional support from his future allies. To that end, he required the British and French forces in Salonika to mount an attack in order at the very least to tie down the Bulgarian troops facing them. Finally, Russia would have to send troops to help defend Dobruja from any forces of the Central Powers that attempted to attack while the bulk of the Romanian Army was trying to secure Transylvania. In July, Brătianu had stipulated that this Russian force should number at least 50,000; as negotiations progressed and the British and French suggested that Romania should attack Bulgaria as well as Hungary, Brătianu increased his demand to 200,000 Russian troops.

Alexeyev was particularly opposed to this, feeling that Russian troops were to be used to defend Romania while Romanian troops seized territory in Transylvania – in other words, Russian blood would be spilled purely for the benefit of Romania, at a time when large stretches of Russian territory remained under German and

Austro-Hungarian control. *Stavka* refused to provide more than 50,000 men, not least because of the ongoing demands of Southwest Front's offensive, and Brătianu threatened to call off negotiations entirely; in the end, the Entente Powers dropped their suggestion for a Romanian attack on Bulgaria in return for Brătianu's accepting a Russian force of only 50,000. Aware that time was running out if the successes of Brusilov's offensive were to be exploited in full, Alexeyev allowed himself to be persuaded that it was worth investing this force to secure Romania's cooperation, consoling himself that if he selected formations that had already suffered serious losses on the Eastern Front, he wouldn't be reducing his fighting strength very much – these units would in any event require time for rest and recuperation before being returned to the front line, and they might as well spend that time in Romania. The Romanians clearly expected the Russian troops in Dobruja to fight energetically against an enemy invasion; from the start, Alexeyev intended them to have as limited a role as possible.

One of the last barriers to Russia's accepting all of Brătianu's terms was Sazonov, who remained deeply sceptical about both Romania's reliability and value. But the influence of the Russian foreign minister was declining. He had a reputation as a reformer, which naturally made Tsarina Alexandra suspicious of him, and during 1916 he proposed that Russia should grant greater autonomy to Poland in an attempt to secure Polish support and to undermine similar proposals by the Central Powers. These proposals were purely theoretical, as Poland was occupied by Russia's enemies, but Alexandra used this as a *casus belli* against someone she had disliked for many years and regarded as a sympathiser of those who would reduce the autocratic power of the tsar in favour of the Duma. She succeeded in having him removed in July 1916. He was one of the most effective ministers in the Russian government, and he would be sorely missed, not least because he was replaced by Stürmer.

There was considerable distrust on all sides in the last days of negotiations with Romania. Brătianu was aware that whilst he was negotiating with all of the Entente Powers, it was physically impossible for aid to reach Romania other than via Russia. He was therefore keen for the forces in Salonika to attack the Bulgarians with sufficient vigour to establish land contact with Romanian forces, thus opening a new line of communication. Such a development would require a major advance by the Anglo-French forces, as it would be impossible for Romania to contribute much, with the bulk of the Romanian Army deployed to invade Transylvania. Brătianu was aware that the French – the overall commander of the Salonika force was the French General Maurice Sarrail – had repeatedly exaggerated the numbers of British and French troops available, and he attempted to force an agreement for the Salonika force to attack at least ten days before Romania declared war. No such agreement was ever secured, and in any event both Sarrail and General George Milne, who commanded the British contingent, were in agreement that they did not intend to launch any major offensive. The best that Brătianu could hope for was some form of allied attack against the Bulgarian and German troops in Macedonia, which might limit the ability of the Central Powers to transfer troops elsewhere.

True to his cautious nature, Brătianu did not wish to proceed with any agreement until he was certain of achieving his aims. Consequently, he insisted that the Entente would commit itself to fighting until Romania had achieved its territorial ambitions, and – remembering the outcome of the Congress of Berlin in the previous century – he wished for Romania to have equal status with the other Entente Powers at any post-war conference. However, Britain, France and Russia all shared the view that it was unacceptable to commit themselves to a war until (from their perspective) obscure pieces of land had been secured by Romania, and that given the huge sacrifices already made by the Entente Powers, it was unreasonable for Romania to be given equal status in any final conference. They therefore agreed amongst themselves that, although they would accept Brătianu's territorial demands, they would only seek to deliver what was possible. With regard to Romania's status at a post-war conference, they agreed that they would conclude all major issues between themselves in advance of any conference, and would only offer Romania rewards that were commensurate with Romanian contributions to the coming campaign. Whilst some diplomats may have felt a few qualms at such double-dealing, others, particularly the Russians, had no such quibbles. They felt that Brătianu was blackmailing the Entente Powers, and that his behaviour justified their own duplicity.[376]

The complexity of the negotiations, and Brătianu's insistence on so many points, ensured that discussions dragged on until the Brusilov Offensive had effectively run out of steam, thus missing the most propitious moment for a Romanian intervention. On 17 August, a treaty was finally signed, and this last stage showed all the hallmarks of Brătianu's endless caution. A meeting was arranged at his brother's house, with all signatories arriving on foot and by different routes to avoid drawing attention. The documents were written out by hand to avoid having to use typists who might prove unreliable, and all those present left one by one in the manner in which they had arrived. Finally, after long wrangling, Romania was ready to enter the war.

Romanian military officials had planned in detail for the coming war. Inevitably, the political imperative to 'liberate' the ethnic Romanian population of Transylvania dominated thinking, and had been in preparation since the beginning of the First World War; prior to that, Romania's alliance with the Central Powers had left all planners under the impression that any future war would be against Russia. The mobilisation plans would summon 800,000 men to the ranks, with another 400,000 available if required – an astonishing 30 per cent of the entire male population of the nation. Of those mobilised, about 440,000 would be combatants, organised into twenty-three infantry divisions and the equivalent of perhaps four cavalry divisions. As Hammerstein had anticipated, these forces would be used primarily for an invasion of Transylvania. The border facing Hungary ran south from Bukovina before turning to the west, and the first proposals were for a major strike across the north–south section whilst maintaining a defensive posture on the east–west section, but this took no account of Bulgarian involvement in any future war. Following the fall of Serbia, when Bulgaria joined the Central Powers, and particularly during the period when the Entente representatives were calling for a Romanian offensive against Bulgaria, it became necessary to modify the war plan, and the final draft of orders, 'Hypothesis Z', was distributed in August. This called for three armies – the North Army close to Bukovina, Second Army in the centre of the Transylvanian front, and First Army facing north, close to the Serbian frontier – to invade as soon as war was declared. Between them, the three armies had two thirds of Romania's fighting strength and were expected to overwhelm the relatively weak gendarmerie and paramilitary units deployed by the Dual Monarchy along the frontier. By the 25th day after mobilisation, the three armies were to have reached the line of the River Mureş before pushing on in two further phases, with completion of the conquest of Transylvania by the fortieth day after mobilisation.

The Romanian Third Army, with a quarter of the available manpower, was tasked with defending the frontier with Bulgaria along the Danube. Once the promised Russian force arrived, there would be a thrust into eastern Bulgaria towards Varna. In keeping with Brătianu's prior demands, this was in the expectation that the Anglo-French forces in Macedonia would have advanced, and it was anticipated that this attack from the north, threatening the Bulgarian capital, would force Bulgaria from the war. Meanwhile, a substantial reserve would be retained close to Bucharest, available to help out in whichever theatre might require support.[377]

As with all plans drawn up in the era, Hypothesis Z was badly flawed. Its particular weakness was that its assessment of the likely reaction of the enemy was inadequate. Although the timetable for the advance into Transylvania was deliberately designed to be completed before the Central Powers could send substantial forces to the area, the planners took little account of the speed with which Germany and Austria-Hungary had transferred troops to the Eastern Front when Brusilov's offensive tore apart the front line. The estimates of the strength of *k.u.k.* forces in Transylvania were also incorrect; the Romanian general staff expected the frontier guards to number about 70,000, and that perhaps an additional 100,000 would be dispatched to the area as reinforcements once the invasion began. The first estimate was more than double the strength of gendarmerie and other formations that actually defended the frontier, and once fighting began the Central Powers sent far greater forces against Romania that the 100,000 expected.[378]

The Romanian general staff (*Marele Stat Major* or *MSM*) that drew up Hypothesis Z was headed by General Vasile Zottu, a man who had no support in the army and was widely disliked. To make matters worse, Brătianu suspected him of being in the pay of the Central Powers; an Austrian agent codenamed 'Gunther' had been discovered, and in his possession was a list of individuals who had received payments from the Dual Monarchy, including Zottu. There is no evidence that Zottu passed any information to 'Gunther' in return for these payments, and it is likely that they represented the purchase of 'goodwill', but Brătianu ensured that a personal close ally, General Dumitru Iliescu, was appointed as secretary-general of the war ministry and thus effectively the second most powerful figure in the army. Whilst this may have helped in terms of loyalty, Iliescu was as unpopular in the army as Zottu and was widely regarded as having no military skills. The highest-ranking Romanian officer with any degree of high regard was General Constantin Christescu, the deputy chief of staff and Iliescu's predecessor in the war ministry.

The army itself might have been numerically impressive, but its fighting capability was very limited. It had not performed well in the Second Balkan War, and although Romanian neutrality in 1914 and 1915 had prevented the sort of losses suffered by other armies, it had also deprived Romanian officers and soldiers of the opportunity to learn about the new ways of war. Modernisation of Romania's army had been part of Iliescu's brief, but his personal lack of competence, combined with the unwillingness of either the Central or the Entente Powers to sell weapons to a nation that they did not trust, ensured that the troops remained poorly equipped. The first ten infantry divisions were perhaps the best, each consisting of two regular brigades and one brigade of older reservists. The next five divisions had two brigades of reservists, while the last six were even weaker, made up of improvised formations. There were few machine-guns, even in the first ten divisions, and although the Romanian Army had a remarkable number of generals – 145 – it had only 220 officers of the rank of major and 820 captains. The quality of the officer corps was also poor. One Russian observer dismissed them as 'effeminate and inefficient', and shortly after mobilisation began, the Romanian Army issued perhaps the most remarkable order of the entire war, stating that only officers above the rank of major were allowed to wear make-up.[379] There was little by way of artillery, and much of this was obsolete; field communications equipment was minimal, and the few aircraft available were outclassed by those they could expect to face once hostilities began. Hipollyte Langlois, a French officer acting as an observer on the Eastern Front, summarised the Romanian Army in a characteristically pithy manner:

> [It had] excellent soldiers, officers who were devoid of all military morality, [and] almost no general staff and command.[380]

Nevertheless, the die was cast and Romania began its mobilisation. Finally, on 27 August came two declarations of war: Italy declared war on Germany, and Romania declared war on the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The first had been expected for some time, and made little difference, but the second came as a serious shock to those who had allowed themselves to be persuaded that Romania would not enter the war at least until the end of the harvest season. The reaction of Kaiser Wilhelm, typical of his hyperbole, was that the war was lost. Coming after Falkenhayn had assured the kaiser that no such declaration was imminent, the Romanian declaration of war proved to be the final bit of pressure that was needed by those demanding a change at *OHL*. Falkenhayn later wrote how events unfolded from his perspective:

> On 28 August the chief of the military cabinet, General Baron von Lyncker, appeared with the message that the kaiser had seen fit to summon Field Marshal von Hindenburg to a consultation the following morning on the military situation that had arisen through Romania's appearance in the ranks of our enemies. To this General von Falkenhayn had to reply that he could only regard this summoning of a subordinate commander, without previous reference to him, for a consultation on a question the solution of which lay in his province alone, as a breach of his authority that he could not accept and as a sign that he no longer possessed the absolute confidence of the Supreme War Lord which was necessary for the continuance of his duties. He therefore begged to be relieved of his appointment.
>
> As what the chief of the general staff regarded as a vital principle was at stake, a conference with him, summoned by His Majesty, could not hope to reconcile

> the conflicting views. His request to be relieved of his office was granted in the early morning of 29 August.[381]

Falkenhayn clearly objected to any consultation of a nominal subordinate on such matters, and in any case must have been aware of all the implications that the news contained and chose to pre-empt events by submitting his resignation. Hindenburg's recollections placed less importance on his summons to meet the kaiser:

> As is known, this was not the first time that my Imperial and Royal master had summoned me to conferences on the military situation and our plans. I therefore expected this time also that His Majesty merely wished to hear my views, personally and orally, about some definite question. As I anticipated being away only a short time, I took just as much kit as was absolutely necessary.[382]

Ludendorff was included in the summons, and recorded that he and Hindenburg left for Pless immediately:

> When we arrived in Pless at 10 a.m. on 29 August we were met by General von Lyncker. He informed us that the field marshal [Hindenburg] had been selected as chief of the general staff; I was to be the second chief. The title 'First Quartermaster-General' seemed more appropriate to me. In my opinion there should only be one chief of the general staff … At the outset, His Majesty said that he hoped for a resolution of the crisis on the front. The Reich Chancellor, who was in Pless at the time, made similar remarks. The thought of achieving peace was not discussed.[383]

Prince Leopold, already commanding an army group on the Eastern Front, was appointed as Hindenburg's successor at *Ober Ost*. Ludendorff's replacement as chief of staff was Max Hoffmann, the inveterate intriguer of *Ober Ost*. As will be seen, this was not the end of Falkenhayn's contribution to the war, but it marked a huge personal setback. He had placed great importance on inflicting sufficient damage on Russia in 1915 to allow him to turn west against France, where he always believed the war would be won or lost, but much of his strategy was hamstrung by his poor relationship with Conrad; the failure of the two men to coordinate their offensives in 1916 resulted in both Germany and Austria-Hungary being fully committed to major assaults at the very moment that Brusilov's armies became active. However, it is unfair to place the blame for the friction between *OHL* and *AOK* entirely on Falkenhayn. Conrad was equally at fault, and whilst Falkenhayn had the defence of acting in a high-handed manner from a position of strength, Conrad had only a string of humiliating defeats behind him.

Falkenhayn's dismissal also owed much to other matters. Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg, who was in Pless when the kaiser met Hindenburg and Ludendorff, was struggling to retain control in the face of growing clamour for unrestricted submarine warfare, fed by growing shortages in Germany as a consequence of Britain's blockade policy. He believed that such a policy would be disastrous in that it would trigger the entry of the United States into the war long before Britain could be starved into defeat, and hoped that by supporting the appointment of Hindenburg, something that was widely demanded by those who advocated unrestricted submarine warfare, he would be able to appease that faction sufficiently to prevent Germany's U-boats from giving the United States sufficient reason to declare war. Consequently, though he was closer in his opinions to Falkenhayn than Hindenburg, he felt that he had little choice but to support the latter's promotion.

The year 1916 had been intended by Falkenhayn to be the turning point, when – with Russia humbled the previous year – the French would be bled to death at Verdun, and Germany would take a huge step towards securing a favourable peace. The failure of the German Army to achieve its objectives at Verdun was largely due to a mixture of mistakes at the level of both planning and execution. It had been Falkenhayn's intention to secure the high ground around Verdun from where German artillery could crush the French Army or force the French to abandon a prestigious position, but the initial attack was only along one bank of the Meuse, and by the time this error was corrected, the French had strengthened their defences. Thereafter, there were miscalculations about the losses being suffered by the French and increasing emphasis on trying to gain geographical objectives rather than following Falkenhayn's original plan of luring the enemy into a huge killing zone. As chief of the general staff, Falkenhayn was ultimately responsible for both these errors. Nevertheless, he had inherited a situation in 1914 in which Germany had no plans for how to conduct a long-term two-front war, and he had seen his country through that crisis. August von Mackensen later wrote about his personal relationship with Falkenhayn, giving an assessment that summarises the views of many of his contemporaries:

> I have never made any secret that I found the brisk, energetic and flexible nature of General von Falkenhayn very engaging. In particular, I truly admired his eye-catching, genuinely soldierly habits. I was also grateful that his clear instructions,

> which never gave rise to any doubts, always gave me great freedom in the implementation of the orders issued to me. There was never any disharmony between us. The written and spoken exchange of ideas with him was always of the highest standard, and was almost always based upon an accurate assessment of the situation. I am of course referring to our immediate dealings and do not express a view about Falkenhayn's overall leadership in the war. Seeckt and I were certain that the chief of the general staff had complete confidence in our leadership. This may have been why from the beginning to the end he kept such a loose rein on my army group. It cannot be denied that despite the personal kindness that he could show if he wished, the exchange of views with the leaders of other high commands was often hampered and impaired due to personal intransigence and acerbity.
>
> From New Year 1916 onwards the more or less instinctive feeling crept over me that though I stood at the focal point of events and could not judge by direct observation, Falkenhayn was increasingly overburdened by the weight he carried through the crisis-ridden summer and that grew ever harder. He was apparently obsessed by Verdun, where reality was something different and actually far less favourable than he wished to believe. When he left his office, I could certainly not help regretting at a human level that he disappeared so unceremoniously. But I regarded with enthusiasm the appointment of the two men who as a result of their earlier achievements had first call to the high command and who on the basis of my personal experiences carried such a great contribution to the certainty of victory, even though the declaration of war by Romania had worsened the overall situation and many felt so hopeless.[384]

If Conrad – who had been on the receiving end of so much of Falkenhayn's acerbity – felt any sense of *Schadenfreude* at the dismissal of the chief of the German general staff, he kept it to himself; he must have been aware that his own position was far from secure.

As summer came to an end, the war was growing, with the Romanian front adding hundreds of miles of new front line to be manned and defended. It was, perhaps, fitting that Falkenhayn himself would play such a major role in the coming campaign.

CHAPTER 11

THE NEW FRONT: ROMANIA'S GAMBLE

One of Brătianu's many demands prior to agreeing to join the Entente was that the Anglo-French forces in Macedonia should attack the Bulgarians. On 17 August, the very day that the secret agreement was signed in the house of Brătianu's brother in Bucharest, the Bulgarian Army launched its own offensive, taking Sarrail's command by surprise. The assault was deliberately intended to have limited objectives, which it secured within days, resulting in a much shorter front line. As the British and French troops in Macedonia scrambled to respond and resistance grew stronger, the Bulgarians stepped down their efforts and began to transfer troops towards the Romanian frontier. August von Mackensen, who had overall command of the forces of the Central Powers on this front, followed them a few days later.

These developments caused considerable alarm in Bucharest, where Brătianu could see his hopes of the Bulgarians being tied down by powerful Anglo-French pressure disappearing by the hour. Nevertheless, he called a crown council on 27 August where the decision to go to war was revealed to the government. Some conservative factions were against the act, but there was general approval, even though Brătianu admitted that despite all his caution and planning, he was unable to guarantee success.

In scenes reminiscent of towns and cities all across Europe in 1914, the Romanian Army departed for war, waved off from railway stations by civilians singing patriotic songs. But whilst many – perhaps most – Romanians welcomed the declaration of war, others had doubts. Some still harboured strong anti-Russian sentiments as a consequence of the high-handed manner in which Russia had seized territory from Romania at the Congress of Berlin, and questioned how Romania could ally itself with a nation that controlled territory regarded by Romania as its own. Others doubted that Germany would allow the Austro-Hungarian Empire to be defeated. It seems that few – in the army, the political establishment or the population at large – asked the far more important question: what was the likelihood of Romania's inexperienced army succeeding against forces that had been in combat for two long years?

The first major casualty of Romania's declaration of war was a surprising one. Almost immediately, General Zottu took leave of absence from *MSM*. The precise motive for this is not clear, but Brătianu was not in the slightest bit dismayed by this development, and immediately appointed his ally Iliescu to become the new chief of general staff. In doing so, he ignored all normal military procedures and far exceeded his powers, but such was his personal position within the Romanian establishment that this act was not challenged by anyone. From the perspective of the army, the change made little difference; both men were almost universally disliked and regarded as having no military talent. Once hostilities commenced, *MSM* was divided into two sections, with the largely administrative sections remaining in Bucharest while the other, the *Marele Cartier General* ('Great General Headquarters' or *MCG*), deployed in the field. At the same time, Brătianu dispersed the few able officers in *MSM* to his field armies; the only staff officer with any real aptitude, Major Radu Rosetti, became an important figure in *MCG*, handling most of the signals traffic with the field armies.

Even as the Romanian Army moved across the frontier into Transylvania, the civilians of Romania experienced a sudden realisation of the realities of modern war when a German zeppelin appeared over Bucharest late on 28 August. Its bombs did little damage, but its very presence showed that Romania's enemies possessed technology in the face of which Romania was helpless. The zeppelin returned several times in the coming nights, and though the damage it inflicted was minimal, it was a constant reminder of German power and Romanian impotence.

Mobilisation had been under way for several days before the declaration of war, but concentration of forces did not go smoothly. Due to the limitations of the Romanian railway system and logistic services, battalions that should have been allocated to specific divisions were frequently ordered to join a nearby division rather than clog up the railways. As a consequence, army and corps commanders had little idea right up to the outbreak of war precisely what units they would command, and how strong they would be. To make matters worse, the appointment of commanders to the Romanian field armies was frequently at a very late stage. General Mihai Aslan learned that he would command Third Army, facing Bulgaria, in mid-August, but others learned of their appointments much later. They were not familiar with the terrain over which they were expected to advance, and in most cases had little idea of the details of Hypothesis Z. None of the six corps commanders knew their commands and they received their appointments just two or three days before war broke out. Given that Hypothesis Z required the Romanian Army to strike before the enemy could react, this was hardly the most effective way of launching a swift operation.

Whilst there may have been confusion in Vienna about when war with Romania would come, the reality of war was generally accepted and planning had begun for how to deal with it. The Hungarian authorities were reluctant to replace civilian border guards in Transylvania with troops for fear of creating civil unrest – the Romanian population might become restless, and the Hungarian and German population might attempt to leave. Nevertheless, a new army command was created to oversee the defence of Transylvania; following the dissolution of Puhallo's First Army on the Eastern Front, a new First Army was to be formed in Hungary. Its commander would be General Arthur Arz, who had commanded VI Corps since the first autumn of the war with some distinction. The corps had fought well in the defence of Krakow in December 1914 at the Battle of Limanowa-Łapanów, and had continued to impress during its time as part of Mackensen's forces in the great offensive across Poland. Although it had been driven back in the summer of 1916, it had shown more resilience than most Austro-Hungarian formations, and there can have been few in the German or Austro-Hungarian camps who questioned Arz's appointment. An additional factor was that his family was part of the ethnic German community living in Transylvania, the descendants of Saxons who had settled in the region centuries before, and he was therefore familiar with the terrain on which he would be fighting. At the time of his appointment, he noted that he was an army commander without an army, but this would change rapidly. For the moment, he had to make do with a few burned-out formations that had been transferred from the Eastern Front and were still being brought up to strength:

> At first, I had only fifteen very weak infantry battalions, ten field artillery batteries and four *Honvéd* hussar regiments in Transylvania, and four battalions and three batteries at Orsowa …
>
> As reinforcements I could expect the fought-out 51st *Honvéd* Infantry Division and the brave Transylvanian 82nd Szekler Regiment, and ultimately a few other battalions that were being formed.[385]

It was estimated that it would be the second half of September before sufficient forces could be moved to Transylvania to mount a proper defence; in the meantime, local commanders were to keep their forces intact and trade space for time, and Arz travelled to as many of his units as possible in the days before the outbreak of hostilities to ensure that they understood the delicate balance they had to keep: the Romanians were to be halted as close to the frontier as possible, but all formations were to avoid being drawn into protracted battles that might leave them too weak.

The declaration of war was passed to Austro-Hungarian officials at the foreign ministry in Vienna at 9 p.m. on 27 August, and at the same moment Romanian forces began to cross the border. Mobilisation was not complete, and the initial objective was to secure areas inside Transylvania where the invading armies would be brought up to strength before continuing their advance. The North Army, in northeast Romania, was under the command of General Constantin Prezan, a man widely regarded as more a courtier than a serious army officer, but fortunately for the Romanians his operations officer was Captain Ion Antonescu, who would become head of state during the Second World War. Unlike his army commander, he was a talented if prickly individual who swiftly converted the stipulations of Hypothesis Z into operational orders. Six groups of soldiers from North Army crossed the frontier during the first night, securing the main passes through the mountainous terrain; they only encountered serious resistance at two points, and on both occasions the Austro-Hungarian defenders – largely from one of the battered *Landsturm* divisions assigned to Arz – swiftly pulled back.

Hypothesis Z expected Lechitsky's Ninth Army to make a supporting attack against Pflanzer-Baltin, but remarkably, there had been no prior discussion with the Russians about such a proposal. On 30 August, when Prezan was reporting to *MCG* that the enemy was 'fragmented in isolated and disorganised units, beaten all along the front, in retreat followed by our columns', Lechitsky sent a liaison officer across the border with a wireless set to ask Prezan if he wished to cooperate.[386] Given the expectation in Hypothesis Z for such cooperation, it was remarkable that *MCG* now ordered Prezan not to take part in any joint operation. Lechitsky's proposal was judged to be more in the interests of the Russians than the Romanians, at least in the short term, and despite the glaring manner in which this contradicted with the planned cooperation between Lechitsky and the Romanian North Army, Brătianu had no intention of doing anything that did not exclusively serve Romanian interests. There was also the question of the ongoing distrust of Russia after the loss of territory at the Congress of Berlin.

Despite the lack of coordination with Russian forces, the Romanian North Army made encouraging progress in the opening days of the war. By the end of

August, a broad strip of territory up to 8 miles (13km) deep had been secured. A little to the south was the Romanian Second Army, and its leading elements also crossed into Transylvania on the first evening of the war. Its commander was General Alexandru Averescu, who had started his military career as a cavalry sergeant during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78, and had played a prominent role in the suppression of unrest in Romania in 1907. In that year, many Romanian peasants had taken part in widespread turmoil due to inequity of land ownership – most rural land was owned by rich families who preferred to live in cities and left the running of their estates to intermediaries. In turn, the intermediaries would employ peasants or subcontract parcels of land to them on short leases. The peasants who worked the land had long resented this arrangement and after one intermediary refused to renew the leases of the local peasants, many took matters into their own hands and burned several country estates. The army was mobilised and used to crush what became known as the Peasants' Revolt resulting in the deaths of about 11,000 peasants, though some put the figure closer to 20,000.[387] Averescu led troops who helped to suppress the revolt, repeatedly punishing soldiers who showed reluctance to use violence and other harsh measures against the peasants.[388] By 1916, he had served as Romania's war minister and chief of the general staff, but his relationship with Brătianu was poor and he left the latter post in 1913. In the years that followed, he repeatedly made suggestions that were unpopular with Brătianu and Iliescu – for example, reducing the number of divisions in Romania's army to concentrate resources more effectively – and he expected to become chief of staff at *MCG* when hostilities commenced. When he learned that he was instead to command Second Army, he protested personally to King Ferdinand, but in vain.

Just as had been the case further north, Averescu's troops crossed into Transylvania and encountered only minimal resistance, the exception being the regulars of the Austro-Hungarian 71st Infantry Division who fought a brief battle before pulling back in good order. Facing terrain that was more difficult than further north, Second Army advanced slowly but steadily across the mountains into Transylvania. On 15 September, the Romanians reached and captured the town of Făjăraş after the toughest battle they had so far fought, with about 1,000 casualties on each side. To date, Second Army could regard its progress as satisfactory, having advanced up to 60 miles (100km) into Transylvania.

Further to the west was the Romanian First Army, commanded by General Ion Culcer. As was almost inevitably the case in the Romanian Army, he was ill suited to his post, widely regarded as an intelligent theorist but dull and uninspiring. His army advanced along three axes separated by mountainous terrain, preventing any cooperation between the groups, on an overall front of over 150 miles (260km). The most eastern column had the easiest route along the course of a railway line through the Red Tower Pass, and after a slow and cautious start it reached Sibiu, known to the Austro-German parts of its population as Hermannstadt. Elements of the Austro-Hungarian 51st Infantry Division had retreated into the town but decided not to get drawn into a protracted and costly battle, and began to withdraw further north. Civilian representatives of the population invited the Romanians to occupy Sibiu, but the local Romanian commander was unwilling to take such a step without permission. It is difficult to imagine an officer of any other army of the First World War showing such reticence, and the difficulties with communications to higher authorities resulted in events degenerating into farce. *MCG* granted permission for the capture of the town, but there were additional delays while the commander of the Romanian 23rd Infantry Division made detailed plans for a victory march. In the meantime, the small Austro-Hungarian rearguard in Sibiu completed its evacuation of military *matériel*; even after this was complete, there was still no movement by the Romanians, to the astonishment of the minimal defence force still in the town, about 300 *Landsturm* commanded by Major Reiner. Originally, Reiner had intended not to contest any Romanian entry into the town, but as time passed, he began to draw up plans for a determined defence.

The central column of First Army crossed the border and moved into a region of valuable coalmines, whose output was vital for the Hungarian railway system. This was the first location of any military or commercial value to fall into Romanian hands, and consequently it was no surprise that it was also the scene of the first counterattack on 8 September. The Romanians had little difficulty repulsing it, but although they were originally ordered to advance to the line of the Mureş, they paused a little to the north of Petroşeni. Fighting continued here almost continuously for several days, reducing the town to rubble before it was finally left in the hands of Arz's First Army. The third column of Culcer's army, advancing northwest, swiftly reached its primary objective of Orşova, where it halted in accordance with Hypothesis Z.

When the Romanian Army had invaded Bulgarian territory in the Second Balkan War of 1913, the Bulgarian Army was fully committed in fighting against the Greeks and Serbs and the 'invasion' was little more than a victory march; no combat casualties were recorded, though 6,000 men were hospitalised or killed by a cholera outbreak.[389] In the first few days of this new war, the advance into Transylvania appeared to be following a similar path, though there had clearly been some fighting, and there was widespread jubilation across Romania.

The Romanian section of the Transylvanian population in the 'liberated' areas predictably greeted the arrival of their countrymen with enthusiasm, while many of the Hungarian and – to a lesser extent – the German population attempted to flee, as Arz later described:

> Nobody who saw this moving scene will ever forget it.
>
> No road or track was free of long caravans. Men, women, the elderly, children, the sick and the infirm passed by on overloaded wagons or on foot. Whole communities had set off into the unknown together. All their possessions that could be taken with them had been gathered up. Herds of cattle numbering up to two or three thousand, collectively amounting to a third of a million head, together with half a million sheep and pigs, even herds of geese, filled the spaces between the countless wagon columns. Driven by fear that within a few days they would see their homes go up in flames, the refugees pushed onwards. The beautiful August weather, with the splendour of the golden sunshine on the rich fields of grain, gave a harrowing counterpoint to the chaos of the day.[390]

However, the news from elsewhere was far less favourable for Romania, and the weakness of its armies was about to become abundantly clear.

August von Mackensen, who had commanded armies with such distinction throughout 1915, had spent the whole of 1916 in command of the mixed forces facing Sarrail's Anglo-French troops in Macedonia. At the beginning of the year, he had been invited to Sofia as a guest of Tsar Ferdinand, and the two men clearly enjoyed each other's company; the tsar's second wife, Eleanor Reuss of Köstritz, had been selected purely to be Ferdinand's consort and there was no real affection between the two. Mackensen noted that she was particularly glad to have a visitor with whom she could converse in her native German. Ferdinand's son and heir, Boris, was a 22-year-old officer in the army and was assigned to Mackensen's headquarters, much to the satisfaction of the German field marshal:

> I found in the earnest, widely travelled, young gentleman who was full of character … a tactful man who had the trust of his father. Moreover, he was also a soldier. As such, he had come to know and love his fellow Bulgarians in the front line.[391]

Aware that war with Romania was coming, Mackensen had assigned a staff officer and an engineering officer to consider the possibilities of invading southeast Romania across the Danube at Svistov, but accepted with some reluctance Falkenhayn's plans for an initial advance into Dobruja. He was eventually persuaded to adopt this due to the pressing desire of the Bulgarians to recover territory that they had lost in the Second Balkan War. He recorded his misgivings in his diary:

> It is the view of the high command that in a war with Romania, the invasion of Transylvania by powerful forces can only be effectively halted if our troops cross the Danube at designated points and threaten the rear of the forces marching against Transylvania and Bucharest itself. A campaign in Dobruja cannot achieve this purpose as the Danube protects the Romanian heartland, and a decision cannot be forced there as the distance is too great to threaten the Romanian operation against Transylvania.[392]

Nevertheless, he accepted that the decisive crossing of the Danube would be helped by a short but conclusive campaign south of the river. Shortly after news arrived of the declaration of war by Romania, Falkenhayn sent instructions to Mackensen to commence an advance in Dobruja as soon as possible. Plans were already in place for an advance by two Bulgarian infantry divisions with support from German units on either flank, and Mackensen moved to his new headquarters in Tarnovo on 31 August. With Seeckt dispatched to become Archduke Karl's chief of staff (and thus effectively in command of the Austro-Hungarian army group at the southern end of the Eastern Front), Mackensen was assigned Generalmajor Gerhard Tappen, a man he knew well from pre-war days. In the short period before Tappen arrived, the acting chief of staff was Oberstleutnant Richard Hentsch. Mackensen was very happy with the new arrangements:

> [Tappen's] work is outstanding, perhaps even better than that of Hentsch. In any case, of all the chiefs of staff that I have had so far in the war, he is the one who appears to suit me best. That is no criticism of the others, none of whom are inferior to Tappen, and Grünert for example remains close to me personally. Seeckt was perhaps the most gifted of them all. But working with Tappen suits me better. I can only hope that this will remain so.[393]

The view was reciprocated by Tappen:

> I would say that our cooperation and mutual understanding was ideal. As far as I can recall, during the time of our working together there was never an occasion when there was a difference of opinion between us. Field Marshal von Mackensen was an example for all his subordinates. He was self-disciplined as a solder,

> quick-witted, he stuck to a decision once it was made, always turned out as a crisp hussar general who recognised no difficulties or dangers, a man with unshakable religious faith, friendly, kind, ready to help others and comradely to all, who held his kaiser and Supreme Warlord [*Obersten Kriegsherr*, the kaiser's official title during the war] in unbroken faith and devotion, a real German man – thus I saw Mackensen and thus will he remain in history as the great and successful field commander of the World War.[394]

Mackensen's latest command consisted of the Bulgarian Third Army under General Stefan Toshev, with a little over two infantry divisions, a cavalry division, and a composite formation known as *Abteilung Kaufmann*. He was anxious to strike against the Romanians before the arrival of Russian troops, but found himself hindered by the Bulgarians, who only declared war on Romania on 1 September. Even now, he found himself facing difficulties in starting his campaign:

> I had a meeting with General Toshev, the commander of the Bulgarian Third Army, on 31 August … I accordingly gave the general orders and discussed their execution with him. During the night of 1–2 September all the operational troops on the Dobruja border were to cross the frontier, the bulk towards Tutrakan with the main reserve moving from Varna towards Dobrici.
>
> From my discussions with the general who was highly regarded in Bulgaria I got the impression that at the head of the Bulgarian Third Army stood admittedly a highly educated, honourable man with a most active mind, but a timid soldier, and this impression was reinforced some days later when the general requested a postponement in the advance. I had to send Oberst Hentsch to him as quickly as possible by truck to remind him urgently that in the current situation, success would come through attacking without delay, and any postponement would result in irretrievable setbacks, and indeed would suggest complete failure to seize the moment. Any delay would result in us facing a stronger enemy. I was prepared to be answerable for the outcome. A senior commander had to be optimistic, i.e. to have faith in himself and in God and must make decisions not based upon reports of the enemy but on the basis of his own will. The Romanian frontier was to be crossed at midnight – and it was so.[395]

The tension between Mackensen and Toshev centred on a disagreement about the initial objectives. Mackensen wished to send one division against Tutrakan and another against Silistra, but Toshev disagreed. He argued for an attack first against Tutrakan, and then towards Silistra; having been on the frontier for many months, he believed that the deployment of the Romanian forces would favour such a sequential approach. On this occasion, as can be seen from Mackensen's account, the German field marshal was persuaded to alter his own plans in favour of those of Toshev.[396]

The troops of the Bulgarian Army had fought well in the invasion of Serbia in late 1915, against both the Serbs and the Anglo-French force that attempted to intervene from Macedonia. However, most of the men of Third Army had been facing the Romanian frontier since Bulgaria's entry into the war and had therefore not gained any experience from the battles of 1915. Nevertheless, despite some resentment at the attempts of the Germans to improve their training and methods, the Bulgarians had benefited from substantial supplies from Germany. Moreover, the area that they would be attacking contained a large Bulgarian population, having been seized from Bulgaria in the Second Balkan War. There was therefore a strong desire for revenge and to 'liberate' an area that had been part of Bulgaria just a few years before.

The first objective facing Mackensen's forces was the fortress of Tutrakan (Turtucaia to its Romanian occupants), on the south bank of the Danube. Like many cities in strategically important locations, it had been fortified in the latter part of the 19th century, but like all such fortresses many of its defences had been rendered largely obsolete by the rapid development of artillery in subsequent years. Nevertheless, it was – on paper at least – a formidable obstacle. Its old Turkish fortifications had been modernised in the years leading up to Romania's entry in the war with the aid of foreign experts, and there were three lines of defences. Of these, the outer ring consisted largely of small outposts, and only the middle ring amounted to a serious obstacle for an attacking army, with a series of fifteen forts. The gaps between them were meant to be blocked by barbed wire and trenches, but these links were incomplete when hostilities broke out, rendering them largely useless. All such defensive positions were greatly dependent upon artillery that could destroy attacking formations when they were held up by the fortifications, and the guns allocated for the defences were inadequate; the few heavy guns were old and cumbersome with limited fields of fire, while the rest were mainly 53mm or smaller.[397] In total, there were about 160 guns in the fortifications, with additional fire support available from the gunboats and monitors of the Romanian Danube Flotilla. The defences were divided into three sectors: Sector I facing the village of Staro Selo to the west; Sector II facing south towards Daidur; and Sector III making up the eastern side, facing Antimovo.

Ultimately, the strength of any defensive line depended upon the men who would hold it. The garrison of Tutrakan was the Romanian 17th Infantry Division, with two regular and two reserve regiments. The value of the reserve regiments was modest at best; they were poorly equipped, with few officers and NCOs of any value. In total, there were about 20,000 defenders in nineteen battalions. They had sixty-six machine-guns available to them, but the reservists who made up all of the two reserve regiments and a substantial part of the regular regiments had little or no experience in their use. The fortress was less than 9 miles (15km) from the frontier, almost guaranteeing that it would come under attack at an early stage, and the inexperienced garrison felt exposed and unsupported, not least because there was no bridge between the fortress and the Romanian hinterland to the north. The commander of 17th Infantry Division and the fortress itself was General Constantin Teodorescu, who had a background in military engineering and had overseen many of the improvements in the fortifications immediately before the war. He was aware that his artillery was limited and had requested additional guns on several occasions without success; despite this, many within Romania regarded the fortress as the 'Verdun of the east'.

Mackensen's forces crossed the frontier in strength on 2 September. The bulk of the assault was in the northern sector, with the Bulgarian 1st and 4th Infantry Divisions and *Abteilung Kaufmann*. The initial defences on the front line were swiftly overrun, and then the forces earmarked for the assault on Tutrakan – collectively commanded by General Panteley Kiselov of the 4th Infantry Division – began to close in on the fortress. Kaufmann's force rapidly penetrated into the western edge of the Tutrakan defences before the artillery fire of the Romanian monitors on the Danube brought them to a halt. To the south of the fortress, the bulk of the Bulgarian 4th Infantry Division advanced against minimal resistance to within range of the main defensive line; the Bulgarian 1st Infantry Division had been tasked with circling around to the east of Tutrakan and inserting itself between the defences in Sector III and Silistra, another 30 miles (50km) to the east. If resistance south of Tutrakan was minimal, it was effectively nonexistent in 1st Infantry Division's sector.

By the end of the first day, Tutrakan was already isolated from the rest of the Romanian forces south of the Danube. Teodorescu sent a telegram to *MCG* recommending a timely evacuation, but he was overruled and ordered to hold his positions at all costs. In recognition of the threat to Tutrakan, some of Romania's reserves gathered around Budapest were ordered to proceed to the town of Oltenița, on the north bank of the Danube opposite Tutrakan, from where they could be ferried into the fortress by boats. The original intention was to move the reinforcements by train, but the railways were still struggling to complete all of the movements required by Romania's mobilisation plans, and instead all available motorised transport was pressed into service. Despite these measures few of the troops reached Oltenița in time to make a difference.

Having isolated Tutrakan, Kiselov moved his troops into position and brought forward his heavy artillery and the essential ammunition. The main fighting on 3 September occurred to the west of Tutrakan, where *Abteilung Kaufmann* divided into three columns and attempted to seize high ground that would allow them to dominate the defences. All of them were brought to a halt by defensive fire and forced to withdraw, leaving behind perhaps 300 dead and wounded. While Kiselov continued his deliberate preparations, other Romanian forces south of the Danube attempted to come to the aid of Teodorescu. The Romanian 19th Infantry Division was in the southern part of the front in Dobruja to the east of the town of Dobrici (Bazargic to the Romanians). Even before the Bulgarian Army crossed the frontier, irregular forces of Bulgarians, including many from the local Bulgarian population, seized parts of Dobrici and left other areas ablaze. At first, the Romanian 19th Infantry Division was ordered to retake the town, but its commander then decided to wait until the arrival of Russian reinforcements. His decision was immediately reversed by *MCG* and the Romanian forces attempted to storm Dobrici on 5 September. By now, the irregulars in the town had been reinforced by elements of the Bulgarian army, and the attack was beaten off with some ease. The Romanian cause was not helped by the commander of 19th Infantry Division, General Nicolae Arghirescu, who ordered his men to withdraw and drove off in a motor car, effectively abandoning them.

In keeping with the agreement with Brătianu, Russia had sent a force into Romania to help defend Dobruja. Its commander was Andrei Zayontchovsky, the commander of XXX Corps, and he was now assigned to the command of a new XLVII Corps, consisting of a burned-out Russian infantry division, a weak Cossack cavalry division, and a division of Serbian troops who had been serving in the *k.u.k.* Army and had been taken prisoner by the Russians. In some cases, they had effectively deserted to the Russians rather than fight for the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but it remained to be seen how effectively they would fight. There was also considerable doubt about the commander of the Russian force. His performance to date had not been impressive, and he had a reputation in some circles for being malicious and indecisive; nevertheless, Brusilov appears to have had a different view:

> I was ordered to appoint the corps commander in Dobruja where he would act independently [of the rest of the Russian Army]. The difficulty of choice was that it was not enough to elect a good military general, but it was also necessary

> that he was a clever man and was able not only to get along with the Romanian authorities, but also to provide them the greatest possible aid. I selected General Zayontchovsky, who it seemed met all the requirements listed above. Such an appointment was very upsetting to the general, and he began to make repeated excuses, referring to the fact that given the composition and quality of the Russian troops assigned to him, he would not be able to hold high the banner of the Russian army, and that he needed at least three or four infantry divisions of high quality or he would run the risk of disgrace and that he frankly could not take such a responsibility. I told him that the mission, quantity and quality of the forces assigned to him did not depend on me, and I suggested that he should go to *Stavka* and discuss matters with Alexeyev to have my choice overruled. With that he went to Mogilev.[398]

It is not clear why Brusilov chose Zayontchovsky for this command, as he was eminently the wrong person for the post; it is conceivable that it was purely to move him from his current post and thus rid himself of an irritant. Alexeyev proved as obdurate as Brusilov, and Zayontchovsky was dispatched to Romania with his new command. He made no secret of his dismay, protesting that the appointment was 'a punishment for some crime that I did not even know I had committed.'[399]

In 1917, Alfred Knox met Zayontchovsky and the two men talked about the events surrounding the dispatch of the Russian expeditionary force to Romania, shedding an interesting light on matters and perhaps explaining why so few troops were sent:

> Zayontchovsky told us when he visited *Stavka* in July and August 1916 he protested to Alexeyev against the detachment of Russian troops to Dobruja, and secondly, if it had been decided to send Russian troops, that the force detailed was too weak.
>
> Alexeyev replied: 'I have been all along opposed to the intervention of Romania, but have been forced to agree to it by pressure from France and England. Now that the principle has been accepted, if the tsar ordered me to send fifteen Russian wounded men there, I would not on any account send sixteen.'
>
> When Zayontchovsky protested once more regarding the smallness of the force, Alexeyev said that he was a coward and unworthy to wear the uniform of a Russian general.[400]

After the failure of the Romanian 19th Infantry Division to recapture Dobrici, Zayontchovsky moved some forces forward in support of the Romanians to make a second attempt, but it was a half-hearted affair, and in any case was too far from

Tutrakan to make any difference to the growing crisis. Determined to hold the fortress at all costs, *MCG* sent a signal to Zayontchovsky on 4 September demanding that he marched immediately to relieve Tutrakan. It was an utterly unrealistic order, and he simply ignored it. Even if he had felt inclined to attempt such a forced march, the Bulgarian cavalry had already moved forward swiftly to block the most direct route of march, and it was therefore impossible for the Russians to reach Tutrakan in time. Closer to Tutrakan was the Romanian 9th Infantry Division in Silistra. It too was ordered to support the threatened fortress; its first probe on 4 September turned back as soon as it encountered elements of the Bulgarian 1st Infantry Division. A second attempt the following day ended in an ignominious rout when the Bulgarians unleashed a sudden artillery bombardment.

Within Tutrakan, Teodorescu sent whatever reserves he had to reinforce his front line. This left him with no troops available to react to any developments that might arise, and the two divisions promised from Bucharest had still to arrive in any significant numbers. Toshev intended to attack the defences on 4 September, but after consulting his subordinates, Kiselov postponed the operation by a day to allow for more preparation. The only significant activity on 4 September was a further attack by Kaufmann on the western perimeter, this time successful, allowing him to capture the valuable high ground. By the end of the day, Romanian reinforcements began to arrive on the north bank, from where they were ferried across the Danube to Tutrakan. Instead of keeping them as a central reserve, Teodorescu simply dispersed them to his defensive line; whatever modest integrity the troops might have had in their pre-existing formations was therefore lost.

Kiselov's plan was to launch his main attack from the south against Sector II of the defences. By concentrating his forces here, Kiselov had achieved a nearly 3:1 superiority in numbers, but his biggest advantage lay in his artillery. Although he had only eighty guns to the defenders' fifty-seven in this sector, his artillery was far heavier, and the Romanian guns were relatively immobile. The bombardment began at 6.30 a.m. on 5 September, concentrating first on the forts of the defensive line and the trenches and barbed wire that linked them, and then on any Romanian guns that attempted to return fire. After the first hour of firing, Bulgarian observers could see Romanian troops abandoning many of their defences and by 8 a.m. three of the four forts in the sector had been sufficiently badly damaged to silence their guns. But when the Bulgarian infantry moved forward shortly after, they met determined resistance. The four defensive forts were finally overwhelmed around midday and the Romanians driven back to their makeshift last line of defence; casualties on both sides were heavy, with one

Bulgarian regiment losing 50 per cent of its personnel.[401] Nevertheless, the attack had succeeded in breaking the defensive line. The defences in Sector III to the east proved far more brittle and were overwhelmed with ease. The western defences were attacked later in the day than elsewhere; Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord, now in command of what had been *Abteilung Kaufmann*, waited until he was certain that his artillery had completely crushed the defences. By the end of the day, only two of the forts in the main defence line were still in Romanian hands, and were too isolated to put up any resistance. Almost all of Teodorescu's artillery had been lost – most of the heavy guns were in fixed emplacements in the forts, and the rest had been abandoned by the demoralised troops when they came under attack.

Early on 6 September, Kiselov's artillery resumed its bombardment. When they advanced, the German and Bulgarian infantry encountered little real resistance, rapidly overwhelming the last line of defence. By doing so, they secured the ridge of high ground to the south of Tutrakan, effectively rendering the town indefensible. Only at one point on the eastern perimeter did they encounter any determined resistance, and even here the Romanians fled when they realised that the column they had thought was a Russian relief force was actually Bulgarian. Teodorescu was ordered not to allow himself to be taken prisoner and crossed the Danube during the afternoon, leaving his garrison to its fate. In his absence, the command of the garrison passed to Colonel Nicolae Mărăşescu, who surrendered unconditionally.

It was a major blow for the Romanians. They had committed nearly 40,000 troops to the defence of Tutrakan, and fewer than 5,000 managed to escape across the Danube. Perhaps 8,000 were killed or wounded; the rest became prisoners of war. The attackers lost about 9,000 dead or wounded.[402] The impact on both Bulgaria and Romania was profound. There was widespread rejoicing in Sofia and elsewhere, and some of the clouds that had descended upon Vienna and Berlin by the Romanian declaration of war began to lift as it became clear that the Romanian Army was poorly trained, equipped and led. By contrast, there was huge dismay in Bucharest, where despite his cautious words about not being able to guarantee success, Brătianu had believed that he had timed Romania's entry into the war in a manner that would make the desired outcome relatively easy to achieve. All of the euphoria about the easy advance into Transylvania disappeared in an instant, and many began to leave Bucharest for the eastern parts of the country. Inevitably, blame centred upon Teodorescu, who was dismissed from command; although he had acted unwisely in committing all of his men into the defensive line rather than keeping a reserve available for counterattacks, he had repeatedly warned higher authorities of the weakness of his position and had requested reinforcements, which failed to arrive until it was too late. General Mihai Aslan, commander of the Romanian Third Army, was also dismissed; he had been almost completely invisible during the opening days of the campaign. General Ion Basarabescu, commander of 9th Infantry Division in Silistra, was another head that rolled. Zayontchovsky was assigned overall command of all Romanian and Russian troops in Dobruja. Brusilov had been right in believing that the man appointed to command the Russian forces sent to Romania should be clever and capable of getting on with the Romanians; Zayontchovsky was probably clever enough for the task, but given his well-known friction with Russian colleagues, it is astonishing that Brusilov considered him remotely suitable for a role requiring a great deal of diplomacy and tact.

Far more important was the effect of the defeat upon Romania's Hypothesis Z. With such a serious blow inflicted in the south and so close to Bucharest, it was impossible to continue the planned invasion of Transylvania with the bulk of Romania's army. Forces began to be transferred south, first slowing the Romanian advance and then bringing it to a complete halt in mid-September. Initially, First and Second Armies had to give up a division each. In military terms, the loss of Tutrakan was both predictable and of little consequence from a tactical or operational perspective; if it had been evacuated in a timely manner, Teodorescu's troops could have been saved and used to guard the north bank of the Danube, and the advance into Transylvania would have continued. The importance of the defeat, largely self-inflicted, therefore lay in its impact upon Romanian intentions.

On 7 September, King Ferdinand summoned senior officials to a conference. The prickly Averescu, who was present, called for a cessation of the advance into Transylvania until the situation in Dobruja could be restored. Once – with Russian help – the threat to southern Romania had been eliminated, it would be possible to resume the advance in the north. In the absence of any other credible plan, his proposals were adopted. He was appointed to command of Third Army, and orders were sent to the northern forces to stop their advance; further formations were to be transferred to the south. Averescu's plan was based upon the need to secure Bucharest from any threat, and the fact that the parts of Transylvania that had already been occupied were sufficiently mountainous to make it possible for reduced Romanian forces to hold them in the event of any counteroffensive by the Central Powers. However, the transfer of so many troops from one theatre to another posed considerable logistic difficulties for the limited Romanian railways.

The decision to abandon Hypothesis Z and switch to a new plan was bold at best, foolhardy at worst. The losses suffered at Tutrakan were serious but not fatal, and the forces in and around the Romanian capital were probably sufficient to hinder any attempt by Mackensen's forces to cross the Danube and threaten Bucharest. However, the entire strategy of Brătianu and therefore of Romania had taken little note of tactical and operational issues, and this latest development owed more to political concerns about Bucharest and a desire to reverse the morale-damaging loss of territory than military necessity. The fact that it originated with Averescu, who was widely regarded in Romania as a military genius, made little difference: if a single division at Tutrakan had been deemed sufficient to protect against a Bulgarian attack across the river, then two divisions from First and Second Armies and the two reserve divisions dispatched to Oltenița from Bucharest were certainly adequate. The Entente Powers had placed huge significance upon the Romanian invasion of Transylvania, calculating that it would place too great a burden on the *k.u.k.* Army and might force first Hungary, then Austria into making a separate peace; by abandoning this invasion, Romania effectively eliminated this possibility and thus the entire Entente rationale behind drawing Romania into the war. However, the mistake in stopping the Transylvanian operation was not Romania's alone. British, French and Russian officials all urged precisely the sort of measures that Averescu was proposing. The only contrary advice came from General Prezan, the commander of North Army, who urged King Ferdinand to consult all field army commanders before making a decision and suggested that the forces facing Transylvania should be allowed to continue their advance until they reached the line of the River Mureş, as had been the intention for the first phase of Hypothesis Z. He also suggested that the Romanian government should move from Bucharest to a location further east, but this was rejected as likely to result in too much demoralisation and panic.

Whilst preparations were made for the proposed conference of field army commanders, events continued to unfold in Dobruja. The Romanian 9th Infantry Division was ordered not to hold Silistra, and retreated east in an attempt to be closer to Zayontchovsky's XLVII Corps so that they could cooperate more closely. Emboldened by the fall of Tutrakan and their successes against Zayontchovsky's half-hearted probe towards the west, the Bulgarians pursued closely, much to the satisfaction of Mackensen:

> Some comments were made expressing doubt whether the Bulgarians would actually seek a passage of arms against the Russians. The last few days have shown that they have defended with great calmness and shown the same enthusiasm for closing with them as they have against the Romanians. The Bulgarians are beside

> themselves with joy. The victory [at Tutrakan] has given their self-confidence a huge boost and renewed their faith in us. They have fought against superior numbers. I only wish that these brave men had better-trained senior commanders. Bulgarian generals lack practice in the command of formations in major battles. They are too easily subject to sudden impressions if they lack a clear overview. The role of German liaison officers in Bulgarian high commands is therefore most significant. But these too are hindered by incomplete technical equipment of the Bulgarian Army for signals, reports and orders. It is not much better with the Turks, whose first battalions have arrived. But one has to make do with the circumstances that prevail and I can be happy with what has been achieved to date.[403]

There were inadequate Romanian forces south of the Danube to allow for protracted defence close to the frontier, and Zayontchovsky's unwillingness to venture west gave *MCG* no option but to order a withdrawal to the east. Silistra fell almost without a fight on 9 September. The first defensive line for the Romanians was from Mangalia on the Black Sea coast to the area where the Danube turned north, roughly along the modern border between Romania and Bulgaria, but a swift advance by Bulgarian cavalry along the coast turned the flank of this position, forcing a further withdrawal. For the first time in the conflict, Romanian civilians were caught up in the fighting and fled with the demoralised troops as they trudged towards the northeast.

Two Turkish divisions had now arrived as reinforcements for Mackensen, but the balance of numbers was steadily tilting against the German-Bulgarian force. As had been the case in the Serbian campaign of 1915, the Bulgarians fought energetically to achieve their territorial and national objectives but were reluctant to proceed beyond them, feeding Mackensen's growing frustration:

> The Bulgarians would like to rest on their laurels instead of advancing. Lately everything is done so slowly by them, as all their supply trains and columns and even some of their artillery batteries are pulled by oxen. Here, I have to deal with situations that nobody at home would imagine.[404]

As the advance entered Romanian territory and almost came to a halt, Mackensen wrote home again about the problems that he faced:

> Unfortunately, my offensive has come to a halt in front of the fortifications that the Romanians have occupied to defend the railway line from Constanța to Cernavodă and in particular the two endpoints of the line and the vital bridges

> over the Danube near the latter. The troops I have driven back have taken up positions there. Whether I can take the positions is very questionable. Oh, if only I had purely German troops! Then I would have been certain of reaching the desired objectives before the Romanians could have brought up their reinforcements, but most [of my troops] are Bulgarian. My opinion of the leadership of their general grows daily poorer. I feel like crying, 'A kingdom for a German division!' The Turks, too, who have now arrived, appear not yet trained for offensive operations. They fell short on their debut on 14 September. It isn't a lack of individual courage, rather of training.[405]

The conference of Romanian front line army commanders was duly held on 15 September in Periş, the small town north of Bucharest where *MCG* was located; General Grigore Crăiniceanu, who had replaced Averescu as commander of Second Army, did not attend due to operational issues on his front. Inevitably, there were repeated clashes between Averescu and Prezan, resulting ultimately in the departure of the latter. The king, Brătianu and Averescu then continued the meeting on their own, as a result of which Averescu was assigned to take command of all of Romania's forces in the south, not just those of Third Army. He was to use them to destroy Mackensen's formations and thus remove the threat to Bucharest.[406]

The operational plan that Averescu devised for the stabilisation of the southern front was characteristically bold and ambitious. After being reinforced with both Romanian and Russian troops, the forces that had been driven back by Mackensen would attack the Bulgarian Third Army; at the same time, a Romanian force would cross the Danube to the west of Tutrakan and therefore far behind Mackensen's northern flank. Caught between the two forces, Mackensen would have no choice but to withdraw in haste or risk destruction. The location selected for the Danube crossing was the small village of Flămânda, about 11 miles (18km) west of Tutrakan, chosen on the basis of its proximity to railway lines and being a point where the Danube was narrow enough to bridge easily with a pontoon bridge. But whilst the location was ideal from the point of view of establishing a crossing, it was a spot that was notorious for flooding during rainy spells.

Meanwhile, events were developing in Transylvania. Following his dismissal as chief of the German general staff, Falkenhayn returned to Berlin on 6 September, where he requested an appointment regardless of whether it was commensurate with his rank. Almost immediately, he received a message from the kaiser, informing him that he had been appointed to command Ninth Army. He was aware that there had been proposals to appoint him as ambassador to the Ottoman Empire:

> I no longer believed that I would be given the front line appointment I sought. Nevertheless, I had already decided to turn down an entry into diplomatic service. Firstly, it seemed unbearable to me effectively to become a spectator of the events of the war. Secondly, it seemed impossible to serve as a direct subordinate of Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg, as his political views were worlds apart from mine.[407]

At this stage, Falkenhayn was aware that no Ninth Army existed; the previous formation bearing this name had been disbanded at the end of July 1916 and its formations dispersed. Although he had been ordered to proceed immediately to Grodno to take up his new command, Falkenhayn decided to await further news in Berlin, and six days later he was joined by Oberst Hans Hesse, who was to be his chief of staff. The two men had worked together in the past, and Falkenhayn had a high opinion of his new subordinate. Hesse informed him that the new Ninth Army would be sent to support Austro-Hungarian forces in Transylvania, and the two men finally departed for the front line on 15 September. In order to give himself a chance to become acquainted with the situation in the front line, Falkenhayn ordered that troops assigned to the new Ninth Army should not be disembarked for a day while he considered where it would be best to deploy them.

Falkenhayn's somewhat whimsical description of the terrain over which his army would be fighting, and its role in the greater scheme of things, recalled past Germanic involvement in this region and is strongly indicative of the continuing legacy of 19th-century German romanticism:

> If the northern part of Transylvania in autumn is not synonymous with paradise, then it is certain that it can be regarded as its forecourt. An almost flawless deep blue sky arched over the fruitful valleys of the Maros [Mureş to the Romanians] and the Olt with their numerous tributaries, and over the beautiful hills that separated the various hollows. Day after day, sunshine flooded the rich fields, all gilded and full of warmth. The pinnacles of the Transylvanian Alps to the south, many covered with snow, were lit up in a wonderful display of colour. There, they shielded this land against the hordes of the Near East, which commenced on their far slopes. To the northeast the endless dark and mysterious forests protected the broad wall of the southern Carpathians against the harsh winds of the Sarmatian plains even in this era. And against any harm that might come from the northwest, the mighty belt of the Ore Mountains guarded Transylvania.
>
> In this Garden of Eden, there were the outlines on many heights of the castles of the German knightly order, so familiar to those from northern Germany. They had fought here for the German way before they took on their great burden along

> the Vistula, and we who followed have allowed their works to fall into ruin – though God willing, not forever. Many bustling, thriving towns not only recalled their German sister towns on the Weser or the Main, but in many cases were near-perfect replicas. Everywhere one came upon villages and hamlets every bit as good as those of Swabia, Franconia or Alsace. In these areas that had been settled by migrating Germans from the Saar region hundreds of years ago, German speech and ways remained unadulterated. But the migrants also bore the marks of their Wallachian predecessors and the Hungarian parts of the population. From them, the Saxons adopted little other than perhaps the joy of colourful clothing and building. In return, they gave them what Germans had brought with them for 600 years until November 1918: a desire for regular work, a sense of order, an understanding of the concept of the common good, the importance of respect for law and for human dignity. In recognition of these benefits, the Transylvanian Wallachians looked with contempt upon the poverty brought by the Boyars on their fellow people on the other side of the mountains. Nowhere did they treat German troops as enemies. Most allegations to the contrary proved to be unfounded on close examination.[408]

The impressions of others were of a somewhat more foreign land, though still with echoes of Germany:

> Crude huts were scattered in the valleys and on the slopes, with black-haired men and women wearing unfamiliar clothing working in the cornfields or staring curiously at the railway stations – the Hungarian-Romanians, who formed the largest part of the population. Amongst them moved gypsies with grubby half-clothed kids in their arms, in tattered coats, trading and haggling or trying to sell tobacco. Not far from the junction of Alvinc, a church tower with a central steeple and small turrets on the corners peeped from behind oak trees and the red rooftops, reminding us of home. We heard a genuine German word: Mühlbach, we heard the sound of our own language from people whose clothing was more familiar to us. Didn't our old grandparents in Franconia or Swabia dress like this; with broad flat hats, waistcoats with silver buttons, short jackets, Lederhosen and high boots – the only unfamiliar item being the shirt hanging out under the coat. The strong, round faces, the bright eyes, no doubt that they were German.[409]

Troops were now arriving in a steady stream to defend Transylvania from the Romanians. Amongst those being sent to the threatened area was General Curt von Morgen, commander of the German I Reserve Corps, who received a telegram on 30 August ordering him to proceed with his staff from his headquarters to *OHL* in Pless prior to being sent to Transylvania:

> In Pless, I also learned about the arrangements for the establishment of a Polish Army. Optimists spoke about 800,000 men. It was the clear duty of *OHL* to look closely at every means of supporting the German Army in view of our unsatisfactory replacement drafts. But anyone who had come to know the Poles also knew that they would not give us any help. I had often conversed with Polish landowners. Whenever the question of their liberation by us from the Russian yoke was raised, they answered evasively. 'We Poles have brothers in the Russian, German and Austrian Armies,' was one oft-repeated phrase. There was no sign of any acknowledgement of our achievements, or any thanks for their liberation and good treatment. They waited for their moment to seize without gratitude the freedom that we had fought to secure them. Had we not defeated the Russians, Poland would still be under the Russian *Generalgouvernement Warsaw* and under the knout of the tsars.[410]

The attempts to convert the Polish Legion, which had fought well for the *k.u.k.* Army, into the nucleus of a much larger force, was absorbing a great deal of energy at the time without achieving much progress, and events would come to a head in November. Meanwhile, Morgen travelled to *AOK* in Teschen for a further briefing from Conrad. Here, he learned that his I Reserve Corps would take command of the *k.u.k.* 61st and 71st Infantry Divisions, both of which were understrength:

> After his exposition on this almost desperate strategic situation Conrad remarked: 'The Romanians have burst across our border like thieves through our open doors.' When I inquired why these doors had not been closed more securely, he replied: 'Yes, well, the diplomats did not believe in a declaration of war until the last moment.'
>
> It was the second surprise, the second defection of an ally in this war. The diplomats of the Central Powers had foreseen neither occasion. First Italy, then Romania!
>
> Bitterly, Conrad complained about his subordinates, particularly Archduke Joseph Ferdinand, who had failed to deliver on two promising operations. The offensive against Rovno [in autumn 1915] faltered due to the faulty handling of his reserves, and the Italian offensive had to be broken off due to the failures of the Archduke at Lutsk …

> It was the tragic fate of the outstanding chief of the Austrian general staff that the instrument that he had at hand failed constantly at the decisive moment, that his ingenious plans could not mature into great successes due to the inabilities of his subordinates and the unreliability of his soldiers, that he exhausted his strength in constant disputes, and that finally he had to experience the great victory over the Italians (in 1917), who were his bitterest enemies, with his hands tied and in a subsidiary role.[411]

Morgen's comments are remarkable for their inaccuracy, particularly in an account that was written in 1920. Whilst it is likely that during the war, officers at his level were not aware of the diplomatic situation with Italy and Romania, there is no question that at least in the case of Italy, there was no doubt that the Central Powers were about to lose an ally and gain an enemy. His high opinion of Conrad is also remarkable, and ignores once more the reality that if the officers and troops of the *k.u.k.* Army proved to be such poor instruments for him in wartime, Conrad only had himself to blame: a very large proportion of the senior officer corps had been instructed by him personally in the years before the war, and almost all aspects of *k.u.k.* operational doctrine were based upon his writings and teachings. Given that those works had been in circulation for many years before the war, it seems odd that Morgen was either not aware of them, or failed to conclude that the poor performance of the *k.u.k.* Army had to be due at least partly to the failings of those who had prepared it for war. It is also remarkable that Conrad should choose to denigrate Archduke Joseph Ferdinand in front of a senior officer of the German Army.

Ultimately, Morgen's I Reserve Corps also incorporated 39th *Honvéd* Infantry Division and 72nd Infantry Division; in addition, the German 89th Infantry Division was expected to arrive in the coming days. General Hermann von Staabs had also arrived with the staff of XXXIX Reserve Corps to take command of 51st *Honvéd* Infantry Division and the German 187th Infantry Division. In addition, the German 3rd Cavalry Division and the *k.u.k.* 1st Cavalry Division formed *Kavalleriekorps Schmettow*. Even if the Romanians hadn't called a halt to their advance in Transylvania, they would have faced a much harder task to press on. Nevertheless, the speed with which the Central Powers had reacted revealed another truth: the best chance of success for Romania had always been in a swift advance to secure a defensible line as far forward as possible before sufficient German and Austro-Hungarian troops could be deployed. With every day that passed, the balance swung ever further against the Romanians. Morgen accurately summed up the situation:

> The Romanians advanced with a strong right wing – three to four divisions – through the mountains against 61st Infantry Division, but probed forward very cautiously against my front. This lack of coordination by the Romanian leadership was our good fortune, as the weak, fragmented Austro-Hungarian forces could not have held in the face of an energetic, coordinated attack. The thin cordon could have been broken anywhere.[412]

Always thinking about options for an attack, Morgen contemplated concentrating his forces against the right flank of the Romanian forces moving against his centre and although Arz supported him, the higher command overruled them. Falkenhayn's new Ninth Army would mount any counteroffensive. In the meantime, Morgen struggled to assert his will over the troops under his command:

> The commander of 39th *Honvéd* Infantry Division explained to me that some of his troops were Romanian and thus could not be regarded as reliable, particularly as we were in a region inhabited by Romanians. When I sought out a regimental commander in the front line, there was nothing of the enemy to be seen apart from Romanian patrols. No sooner had I left than the position was abandoned. I succeeded in getting through to the commander by telephone and ordering him immediately to turn around and reoccupy his positions. He replied that he could not recover the positions without a fight. After I had reminded him that we were at war I reiterated my order, and the old position was occupied without a shot being fired.[413]

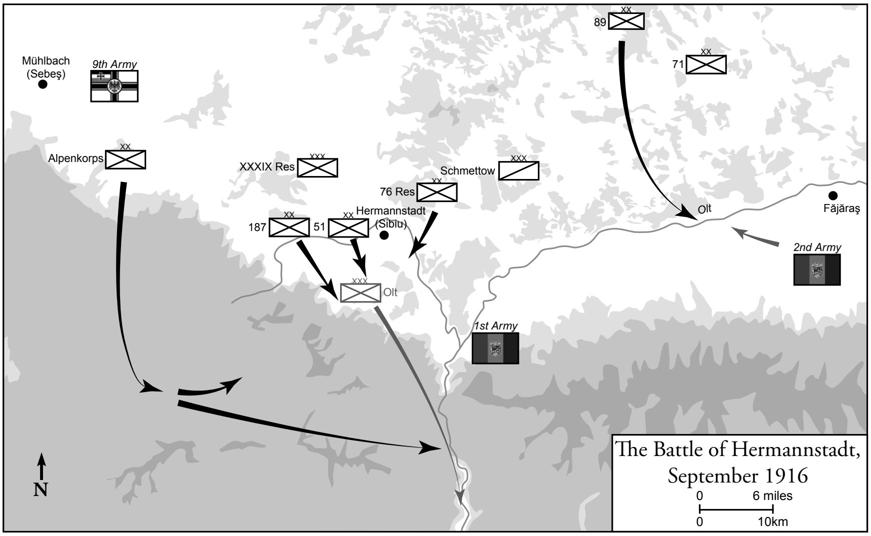
In addition to the troops already listed, Germany's mountain warfare specialists, the *Alpenkorps*, were on their way and Falkenhayn encountered their commander, Generalleutnant Konrad Krafft von Dellmensingen, on 18 September. The Bavarian commander of the *Alpenkorps* (which, despite its name, amounted to about a division) expressed considerable satisfaction at being able to escape the frustrations and casualties of trench warfare in the west with considerable justification: during the fighting around Verdun, the *Alpenkorps* had lost nearly 70 per cent of its personnel. Like other German officers, he had little or no information about the tactical situation in Transylvania, and Falkenhayn urged him to prepare his troops for swift deployment as soon as possible. Next, Falkenhayn travelled to the headquarters of Staabs' XXXIX Corps, where he finally learned about Romanian advances and deployments. Five groups had been identified: a Romanian division (numerically double the strength of a division of the Central Powers) at Orşova in the west; two divisions that had advanced through the Szurduk and Vulcan Passes; a third group, again of two divisions, that had marched north through the Red Tower Pass and was now halted before Hermannstadt; a slightly larger group that had occupied Braşov (Kronstadt to the Germans and Austrians) and had then advanced a further 40 miles (70km) to the northwest; and finally the more substantial forces of the Romanian North Army, which had penetrated perhaps 30 or 40 miles (50 –70km) into eastern Transylvania. Opposing these were the gathering troops of Falkenhayn's command and Arz's First Army.

German commanders also gave Falkenhayn their first impressions of the Romanian Army:

> General Sunkel [Edwin Sunkel, commander of the German 187th Infantry Division] had the impression that the individual Romanian soldiers did not perform badly. They did not cope well with threats to their flanks or rear and to massed artillery fire, apparently, as they felt themselves to be helpless in such circumstances due to the frequent failings of their leadership.[414]

Like Mackensen, Falkenhayn had already decided that the best way of dealing with the entry of Romania into the war was a powerful offensive operation, and Sunkel's impressions reinforced this conclusion. The most tempting target was the Romanian force still languishing outside Hermannstadt, the Olt Corps of General Ioan Popovici. Due to the mountainous terrain, it was almost impossible for the Romanians to hold a continuous front across Transylvania, and Popovici relied on the mountains to protect his flanks. However, reconnaissance by the *Alpenkorps* revealed that it was possible to bypass the western flank of the Olt Corps on foot through the mountains and then turn east to cut off the Romanian line of retreat. Orders were issued for Krafft to begin this manoeuvre; once he had isolated the Olt Corps, the German XXXIX Corps would attack from the north and destroy the Romanian forces. Before he could commence the campaign however, Falkenhayn briefly crossed swords with the new regime in *OHL*. Fearing that Hindenburg and Ludendorff intended to dictate closely how the campaign was to be conducted, he made it clear that he would have the final say in operational matters.[415]

Popovici had very limited knowledge of what was going on to his north. His command possessed three reconnaissance aircraft, but only one was operational and it failed to spot all the German troops that were assembling. Even when he became aware of the growing threat, Popovici was unable to persuade *MCG* of the danger. In any event, it seems that the Romanians failed to notice the



The Battle of Hermannstadt, September 1916

preparations of the *Alpenkorps*. When the first troops set out on the outflanking march on 22 September, they encountered almost no resistance. There were two axes of advance: one, under the command of Oberstleutnant Franz Ritter von Epp, was the main force and was to push south for about 21 miles (36km) before turning east, while the other would turn east sooner to turn the flank of the Romanian line south of Hermannstadt. The commander of this second group was a young major called Friedrich Paulus who celebrated his 25th birthday on the second day of the advance. In a later war, he would lead the German Sixth Army to the shores of the Volga at Stalingrad; there, after the flanks of the German line – defended by Romanian troops allied to Nazi Germany – were overwhelmed by the Red Army, he would surrender with what remained of his command, marking one of the great turning points of the Second World War.

The Romanians of the Olt Corps remained unaware of the threat that was developing to their western flank. Instead of deploying any troops to cover the danger, they made a strong attempt to force the German and Austro-Hungarian defences to the east of Hermannstadt, where the cavalry formations of General Eberhard Graf von Schmettow's group held the line; in most areas, the Romanians made little or no headway. The town of Hermannstadt, still held by Reiner's small *Landsturm* unit, remained uncontested. Whilst the Romanian attack was in some senses helpful to Falkenhayn in that it shifted attention further from the area where he intended to attack, it nevertheless had to be countered, and

Falkenhayn asked Arz's *k.u.k.* First Army to release the German 89th Infantry Division to cover the Romanian advance. At first, Arz was unwilling to comply as he had intended to use the German formation to strengthen his centre and left flank, but Falkenhayn remained insistent, successfully appealing to *OHL* for support. Arz had no choice but to comply.

The troops of the *Alpenkorps* began their arduous march through the almost trackless mountains:

> The landscape was wild and unusual, an area that was still home to wolves and bears; only small mule-tracks wound their way over rocks and screes through the high forest and dense undergrowth, littered with rotting branches torn down by storms. There were wonderful views through the Transylvanian mountains. After a strenuous fourteen-hour march that called for the greatest efforts by men and animals, we had climbed Negovanul (2136m above sea level) and crossed the Voineagul Calanesci ridge. In mountain huts we found equipment and lamps still burning, abandoned by the surprised guards.[416]

Whilst the *Alpenkorps* had originally been formed from Bavarian mountain troops, few of the replacement drafts brought into its ranks had the same level of training and conditioning for the rigours of marching and fighting in the mountains, but to date their rate of progress was everything that their commanders could have hoped for as they laboured over the rugged terrain carrying all their food, water and military supplies with them. Some equipment had been abandoned, but the Romanian positions south of Hermannstadt had effectively been outflanked by the end of 24 September. The following day, the two groups turned east and prepared to attack the Romanian flank and rear. Finally, Popovici became aware of the threat and dispatched two mixed forces of cavalry and infantry, each less than 2,000 strong, to investigate. Neither succeeded in interfering with the preparations of the *Alpenkorps*.

A little further west at the Vulcan Pass, bitter fighting raged as the Romanians threatened to capture the region, which was vital for its coal mines. Falkenhayn received requests for reinforcements from the local commander, but he resolved to adhere to his original plan to destroy Popovici's group before turning his attention elsewhere. He dispatched a single Austro-Hungarian battalion as reinforcements to the Vulcan Pass, keeping his German troops in hand for the coming battle at Hermannstadt. However, as he moved his headquarters forward, Falkenhayn encountered Oberst Josef Huber, Arz's chief of staff, and was irritated to learn that the commander of the *k.u.k.* First Army had not released the German 89th Infantry Division as requested, as it was unlikely that the line in eastern

Transylvania could be held without the help of the German troops. Falkenhayn impressed upon Huber the importance of striking a decisive blow at Hermannstadt: all else was secondary to this task.

Despite the difficulties with Arz and the forces at the Vulcan Pass, Falkenhayn could at least take solace from the fact that the *Alpenkorps* was in position. On 26 September, it swept down to the road running through the Olt Pass south of Hermannstadt and placed itself astride Popovici's supply lines, tearing up the railway line and cutting telephone lines. There were running battles with the Romanian forces in the region, but although the Germans were unable to retain complete control of the pass, it remained under fire from German guns. In one action, there was an indication that as had been the case in Serbia the previous year, the rules of warfare that applied elsewhere were often ignored:

> All [Romanian] attacks collapsed in furious rifle and machine-gun fire and entire infantry sections were cut down on the road and the crossings of the Olt.
>
> Here, thirty-seven men from an advanced section of the 9th Company of the Bavarian Life Guards Infantry Regiment were taken prisoner by the Romanians south of the railway bridge in the Red Tower Pass. The Romanians robbed and mistreated them, avowedly in revenge for the heavy losses that the Romanians had suffered in the preceding fighting. The following morning they were led to a nearby riverbed and fired upon by a unit commanded by an elderly officer. Ten men were killed immediately, twelve more seriously wounded. Only the sudden intervention of German machine-gun fire prevented the massacre of all the defenceless prisoners, and the Romanians fled in panic.[417]

Although they were not able to cut the road completely – some Romanian groups managed to fight their way through – the men of the *Alpenkorps* had won a substantial victory. They had taken over 3,000 prisoners and had captured thirteen guns, six machine-guns, two of Popovici's three aircraft, ten locomotives with 700 loaded railway wagons, a hospital train, and several motor vehicles. By contrast, the attack by XXXIX Corps, intended to collapse the positions of Popovici's Olt Corps, made little headway. Late on 25 September, Falkenhayn received messages suggesting that the Romanians were pulling back some of their artillery and sending it south, and fearing that Popovici might be making a last-minute attempt to escape, Falkenhayn ordered Staabs to attack immediately; however, dusk was already falling and there was little to be gained by attacking at such a late hour. Falkenhayn's description of the following morning is a remarkable mixture of the colourful, and dry and unemotional:

> A magical, beautiful day dawned on 26 September. A cloudless sky grew blue over the fields south of Hermannstadt. There was no wind whatever, wonderful visibility, sunshine with the power of a summer's day for men from north Germany lighting up the slopes and woods with beautiful colours, all presented before our eyes as the prize for which we were going into battle.
>
> The attack of XXXIX Reserve Corps began as planned, watched by me from the high ground north of Orlat. But almost immediately it ran into strongly held positions.
>
> The 187th Infantry Division, which was to make the main effort, was stuck on the high ground at Guraro and Poplaka. The villages were captured during the evening. But the enemy remained in his strong positions on the Cioara and Balare streams.
>
> The 51st *Honvéd* Infantry Division did not advance as it was expecting 187th Infantry Division to prepare the way.
>
> The 76th Reserve Infantry Division was held up so badly in the broken ground east of Hermannstadt that it didn't actually make it into battle.
>
> I felt that the main reason for the delay in the advance of XXXIX Reserve Corps lay in too much subdivision of the artillery and inadequately powerful application of its fire. I therefore advised the corps command to correct these errors as soon as possible and in any case by the next morning.[418]

A little further east, Schmettow's cavalry secured crossings over the Olt, and an attempt by the Romanian cavalry to counter this was broken up with long-range artillery fire. Whilst Falkenhayn might be outnumbered, he had a significant numerical advantage in artillery, further enhanced by the fragility of the Romanians when they came under bombardment, and he rightly assessed this as one of the most effective ways of achieving success quickly. Speed was vital for two reasons: firstly, whilst the *Alpenkorps* was able to disrupt Romanian supplies, it was effectively cut off from the rest of Ninth Army and was in danger of running out of supplies itself. Secondly, there was the danger that the Romanian forces on either flank – particularly to the east – might attempt to intervene to support the Olt Corps. There was a further exchange of messages between Falkenhayn and Arz, which resulted in at least some elements of the German 89th Infantry Division being released for use in the attack.

On 27 September, Staabs tried again. Further elements of the *Alpenkorps* had arrived from the west and were used to support the attack by XXXIX Reserve Corps' western flank with good effect. When the German infantry assaulted the main Romanian positions after heavy artillery preparation, they made far better progress, though they were surprised to find large numbers of civilians amongst the dead and wounded in the Romanian trenches; it transpired that many local inhabitants of Romanian descent had attempted to retreat with the Romanian Army but had perished in the German bombardment.[419] Building on its success of the previous day, Schmettow's cavalry reached the northern end of the Olt Pass, but was unable to gain control of the vital road.

To the east, the Romanian Second Army had been ordered to march to the aid of Popovici, but the terrain was extremely difficult and progress was slow. Further attacks against the western flank of Arz's First Army also continued, and Falkenhayn remained concerned about the ability of the weak *k.u.k.* 71st Infantry Division to prevent Romanian forces from advancing sufficiently far to threaten the eastern flank of his own operation against Popovici. It must therefore have been of some relief to him that he now received definitive orders assigning 89th Infantry Division to his command, and he ordered it to hurry to his eastern flank.

The critical day of the battle had arrived. XXXIX Reserve Corps had started to make progress against the main Romanian positions, while Schmettow's cavalry threatened the Romanian eastern flank. To the west, the isolated *Alpenkorps* continued to keep the Olt Pass under gunfire, but was reaching the end of its ammunition and food supplies. Popovici's force had been driven out of its main line of defences but remained unbroken, and Romanian reinforcements were attempting to fight their way north past the *Alpenkorps*; and to the east, the Romanian Second Army continued to put pressure upon the seam between the German Ninth Army and the *k.u.k.* First Army. All would depend on whether Falkenhayn could achieve the quick victory that he sought.

Early on 28 September, Falkenhayn joined Staabs in the tower of the church in Hermannstadt, from where they watched 187th Infantry Division advance steadily. Reports soon arrived that the flanking formations were also pressing forward as Romanian resistance diminished. Although the Romanian Second Army had been ordered to march to Popovici's aid and had attempted to send a message to Popovici that its leading elements would reach him on 29 September, the message failed to reach the beleaguered Romanian commander. He had written to King Ferdinand on 27 September, lamenting that his men were fighting heroically in the manner of King Leonidas and his Spartans at Thermopylae, but that he was unsupported and alone.[420] Believing that no help would reach him, he began to withdraw to the Olt Pass late on 28 September, where the *Alpenkorps* continued its efforts to cut the road to the south. However, even as Popovici lost hope, there were developments to the east that threatened to turn the battle. Pressure on the extreme western flank of the *k.u.k.* First Army drove back a weak

Hungarian cavalry detachment and the battered 71st Infantry Division. Command of this flank of Arz's forces had passed to Curt von Morgen's I Reserve Corps, and Falkenhayn was alarmed to receive a message from the normally aggressive Morgen that he regarded a further retreat as almost unavoidable. Already, a substantial gap had opened up between Falkenhayn's and Arz's armies, but help was at hand:

> After a tough forced march of over 30km [18 miles] made even harder under the southern sun and along dusty mountain tracks, the brave Berliner tradesmen who formed a large proportion of 89th Infantry Division had already reached their destination of Jakobsdorf and Henndorf. Their commander, General Freiherr von Lüttwitz, had rapidly assessed the situation at the front and had accelerated his march to the utmost. Anticipating my order that reached him while he was en route, he dispatched his vanguard onto the high ground at Retisdorf as soon as it arrived. There could be no doubt that the arrival of new German troops had to bring relief to 71st Infantry Division and also to 7th *k.u.k.* Cavalry Brigade … Whether this would actually be the case was not clear to me that day.
>
> Nor until late at night did I get a full picture of the situation with Tutschel's troops in the mountains. It was clear that they were involved in heavy fighting everywhere. Nor was there any doubt that they would rather be wiped out than give up their positions. But the danger of being wiped out was high and such an outcome would be decisive for the outcome of the operation. Even the situation with XXXIX Reserve Corps and the cavalry corps was not completely clear. The [infantry] corps was closing in from the north and northwest on the entrance to the pass south of Talmesch and the cavalry from the northeast. There were the first signs of a partial collapse of the Romanians in the wreckage of guns and vehicles, the corpses and dead animals, that littered the roads and neighbouring ground. There was no longer determined resistance. But the haul of prisoners remained very small. A swift pursuit was pointless in the wooded mountainous country after darkness fell. The great question would not be settled while the main enemy group remained intact. It was clear that it had suffered very heavy losses. Despite this, it still disposed of substantial forces. Had they found a way through the mountains or just fled into the hills to await the arrival of reinforcements from the south, which as before were reported by the *Alpenkorps* to be detraining to the south?
>
> … Seldom in my life, which had not lacked dramatic moments, had I awaited the outcome with such suspense as on the morning of 29 September.[421]

All worries dissipated the following day. When Staabs' infantry and the cavalry to their east advanced at first light, they encountered almost no resistance, merely the abandoned equipment of an army in flight. In the Olt Pass, the first attempts by the Romanians to slip past the *Alpenkorps* failed in a hail of gunfire, adding to the confusion and disorder of the retreating soldiers. Some chose to press on through the pass as fast as possible, leaving a trail of dead; others made their way south through the mountains along small tracks, some carrying their wounded with them. Eventually, some of Popovici's artillery reached the choke point in the pass and succeeded in shelling the exhausted men of the *Alpenkorps* away from the road. In any event, the Bavarian mountain troops were almost out of ammunition, and could do no more.[422] Nevertheless, the Olt Corps had effectively ceased to exist as a combat force. Most of its artillery and machine-guns had been lost, together with a great deal of other military supplies.

The defeat at Hermannstadt cost Popovici his post. He had been excessively passive in not occupying the town and had failed to react to Falkenhayn's deployment, largely through ignorance, but he was not the only person to have made mistakes; when he became aware of the advance of the *Alpenkorps*, his concerns were dismissed by *MCG*. Although much of the Olt Corps succeeded in escaping back to Romania, it had lost all that mattered – guns, other equipment, and morale. By eliminating the threat at Hermannstadt, Falkenhayn achieved the freedom for manoeuvre that he needed for his outnumbered forces to continue their offensive. In early 1914, the German strategy to defend East Prussia had relied upon the outnumbered Eighth Army to defeat the Russian First and Second Armies by concentrating first against one, then against the other. Now, Falkenhayn intended to use the same approach to defeat the Romanian forces in Transylvania.

CHAPTER 12

AUTUMN

As September came to an end, Averescu completed his preparations to strike into the rear of Mackensen's northern flank. Whilst he might have had a reputation for being difficult and argumentative, his energy was unquestioned. A new road was made to allow troops and equipment to approach the north bank of the Danube at the selected point, and bridging equipment was collected and delivered to Flămânda. However, there remained serious issues. The tiny village of Flămânda provided almost no usable accommodation for Averescu's troops, and most of them had to live in nearby forests in an attempt to avoid detection. Nor had there been adequate consideration of the ability of the Austro-Hungarian Danube Flotilla to intervene in the coming operation. Romanian river forces were divided into two commands, with defence using mines and shore artillery in the hands of Commander Constantin Niculescu-Rizea, while the vessels of the Romanian Danube Flotilla under Admiral Nicolae Negrescu were some considerable distance downstream. It was typical of the disjointed nature of Romanian planning that no plans were made to enlist the help of Negrescu's vessels either to defend the crossing point or to provide artillery support for the troops who crossed.

Averescu gave a final briefing to his subordinates on 29 September, even as Falkenhayn was bringing the fighting at Hermannstadt to a successful conclusion. Whilst his own account gives the impression of a fervent, inspirational speech that was well received, one of his division commanders was sufficiently unimpressed to travel to Bucharest to express his doubts.[423] But there was no real alternative. With the advance into Transylvania brought to a standstill, Romania needed to achieve a success elsewhere in order to restore public and military morale.

The 'Flămânda Manoeuvre', as it became known, commenced late on 30 September. The first troops to cross the Danube were from the Romanian 10th Infantry Division, and they secured a position on the south bank during the night without encountering any opposition. On the first day of October, they were joined by 21st Infantry Division and established a bridgehead that stretched for about 2 or 3 miles (3–5km) along the bank and to the south. German aerial reconnaissance had spotted some Romanian marching columns in the preceding days, but although Toshev and the Bulgarians expressed some concern, the Germans dismissed them as nothing more than demonstrations. As a result, the discovery of a powerful Romanian force across the Danube on 1 October caused widespread alarm. On the same day, there was increased Romanian artillery fire on the Dobruja front, and Mackensen learned about the bridgehead at Flămânda as he returned from a visit to the front line:

> I had just left the headquarters of the Bulgarian 1st Infantry Division … when the Bulgarian crown prince sought me out with a report that the Romanians had crossed the Danube at Ryahovo … and had already transferred several battalions and had established a bridge. It was not possible yet to judge what this indicated. It could be an attempt to mount a major operation of considerable significance in the rear of the Bulgarian Third Army, but equally a well-judged demonstration to unsettle anxious minds. I did not doubt for a moment that … I could only interpret it in the latter sense and sought to prevent the Bulgarians from being unsettled by it and thus abandoning an attack by their forces.[424]

After discussions between the Bulgarians and Germans, it was agreed that the German 217th Infantry Division, en route from Macedonia for eastern Dobruja, should be diverted to face the new threat. However, it would take two days to arrive, and in the meantime the only forces available were local militia and a small mixed German and Bulgarian force at Ruse.

The sustainability of Averescu's operation depended on the rapid construction of a pontoon bridge across the Danube, and progress on this was slow. Throughout 1 October, Romanian engineers struggled to extend the bridge across the river, which was over half a mile (nearly 1km) wide at this point. Unable to oppose the crossing with ground forces, the Germans directed all available aircraft to attack both the bridge-builders and the troops assembled on the north bank; although casualties were light, the effect on morale was considerable, as the Romanians had no means of countering the attacks. Nevertheless, the bridge inched forward and reached the south bank in the early evening. Troops, equipment and supplies began to cross in a steady stream, but the weather suddenly turned against the Romanians. A storm developed during the night, stirring up high waves in the Danube. Several pontoons were washed away and the bridge broke completely in three places; despite their exhausting labours of the preceding day, the bridging engineers made huge efforts through the night and were able to restore the bridge by dawn on 2 October. However, as had been acknowledged before the beginning of the operation, the banks of the Danube in this area were prone to flooding, and large expanses of water now developed on the north bank – the only way of reaching the start of the bridge was by boat, effectively stopping the movement of any supply wagons or artillery.

Worse was to come. The Romanians had placed great value in the river defences of Niculescu-Rizea's command, relying on a combination of sunken obstacles and minefields to keep the powerful Austro-Hungarian warships of the Danube Flotilla some distance to the west. The heavy rain resulted in water levels rising sufficiently to render the barriers useless, and the mines proved to be defective, either not exploding at all or detonating while being laid and causing casualties amongst the Romanian personnel. In addition to attempting to block the Danube with underwater obstacles and mines, the Romanians had attempted to strike at the Austro-Hungarian Flotilla as soon as hostilities commenced. Three riverboats were outfitted as torpedo boats and attacked on 27 August, succeeding in setting fire to a fuel lighter but doing no other damage.[425] Now, with no other means of directing major firepower against the Romanian forces attempting to establish a bridgehead on the south bank of the Danube, the warships of the *k.u.k.* Danube Flotilla were ordered downstream to bring their guns to bear.

The first two vessels to arrive were small 60-ton gunboats armed with machine-guns, named *Barch* and *Viza*. They were unable to do any significant damage to the structure of the pontoon bridge, but the fire of their guns drove all Romanian troops to take shelter. Despite taking hits from Romanian artillery on either bank, they stayed until they had exhausted their ammunition before turning back upstream. By now, the Romanian engineers had established a dry approach to the northern end of the bridge across the large expanse of floodwater, and more troops and guns hurried to cross to the south bank. Before long, the Austro-Hungarian warships put in another appearance, this time in the more formidable shape of two monitors, *Bodrog* and *Körös*, each with a displacement of 440 tons and an armament of two 120mm guns, one howitzer and one 66mm gun. *Bodrog* had acquired some fame by firing the first Austro-Hungarian shots of the war when it bombarded Belgrade. The two vessels now opened fire both on the bridge and the forces on either shore, damaging the bridge with their guns and with mines that they released. *Bodrog* was hit five times by defensive fire and *Körös* by twelve rounds, ultimately forcing both ships to withdraw.[426]

Although the damage done to the bridge by the aerial and waterborne attackers was easily repaired, it was clear that the prolonged safety of the crossing could not be guaranteed. In any event, the entire operation was predicated upon a simultaneous advance by the Romanian and Bulgarian forces in eastern Dobruja, and this attack failed to make any impression on Mackensen's line. By now, wireless intercepts had removed any doubt in Mackensen's mind regarding the crossings at Flămânda, and repeated Romanian attacks in eastern Dobruja had been beaten off; however, these were almost entirely launched by Romanian troops without much help from Zayontchovsky's Russian forces. Even as the Austro-Hungarian monitors attacked the bridge at Flămânda, Averescu travelled to *MCG* for further discussions. He suggested two possibilities: either continuing the operation, or pulling back to a small bridgehead that might be the basis of a future action once it became possible to guarantee that there would be no further attacks on the bridge. It is difficult to see how this guarantee could be achieved; although the Romanians possessed four monitors equal to *Bodrog* and *Körös*, any intervention by the Romanian warships on the Danube would bring them under fire from German and Bulgarian artillery in the same manner that *Bodrog* and *Körös* had been driven off. Nevertheless, this was the plan that was adopted and troops began to cross the bridge back to the north bank. As if to highlight the danger to the crossing, two more Austro-Hungarian warships, the monitors *Erms* and *Traun*, returned on 3 October and broke up the bridge; the remaining Romanian troops on the south bank were evacuated by boat, without any attempt to maintain a bridgehead as Averescu had proposed.

Romanian casualties in the Flămânda manoeuvre were modest, largely suffered during the attacks on the bridge; the first major German-Bulgarian infantry attack on the bridgehead was cancelled when it became clear that the Romanians were withdrawing. Coming at the same time as news of the setbacks in Transylvania arrived, the impact of the abandonment of the crossing was profound on Romanian morale. Despite being the author of the plan, Averescu emerged with little damage to his reputation, and as the forces that had been gathered for the Danube crossing were dispersed, he was dispatched to take command of the Romanian Second Army in the north. For the Romanian government and military high command, there was now a growing sense of crisis. Their gamble on swift gains backed up by a substantial Russian force in Dobruja, combined with an Anglo-French offensive from Macedonia, had not paid off.

Following up on his earlier doubts, Alexeyev had made it abundantly clear to both the Romanians and the French, who had perhaps been the most enthusiastic about Romania joining the Entente, that he would not commit troops to defend Romania's frontiers. If necessary, he would defend a line that ran from the Carpathians to the Black Sea and included only a very small part of Romania. Committing Russian troops to defend areas further west, such as Bucharest, was completely out of the question.

Just as it depressed Romanian morale, the failure of the Flămânda manoeuvre provided a further boost to the morale of the Central Powers. Despite failing in his intention to isolate and destroy the Olt Corps, Falkenhayn had nevertheless damaged it severely, not least because troops that might have halted the assault of XXXIX Reserve Corps had been diverted south to create Averescu's force for the Danube crossing, and the former chief of the German general staff now turned his attention further east, leaving the *Alpenkorps* to block off the northern end of the Olt Pass. He was helped by the capture of a Romanian pilot who had been given a message for Popovici by the commander of the Romanian Second Army; the pilot had landed behind German lines and had been taken prisoner before he had a chance to destroy the package he was carrying. The message spelled out the location of the relief column that had been sent to aid Popovici, and Falkenhayn accordingly issued orders on 29 September to strike against this threat. The attack against the Olt Corps had been a simple outflanking manoeuvre; to deal with the Romanian Second Army, Falkenhayn proposed to attack along the valley of the Olt with XXXIX Reserve Corps and Schmettow's cavalry, while Morgen's I Reserve Corps – with the German 89th Infantry Division and the *k.u.k.* 71st Infantry Division – moved forward in parallel to the north. At first, Falkenhayn intended to relieve the *Alpenkorps* with elements of 51st *Honvéd* Infantry Division and send the mountain troops with the rest of the Hungarian division past the southern flank of the Romanian Second Army, but after further consideration he concluded that the terrain was too difficult for such an operation.

When Morgen moved forward at the beginning of October, his 89th Infantry Division rapidly overcame the Romanian defences north of the Olt, and it seemed as if a swift victory would follow. Unfortunately for Morgen's corps, 71st Infantry Division failed to advance alongside the German division, thus exposing the flank of 89th Infantry Division to a determined Romanian counterattack by elements of four infantry divisions. An officer who experienced the battle later described it:

> Horns blew, there were loud hurrahs, and in moments 89th Infantry Division was thrown off the heights in a bayonet attack. The German assault columns streamed

> back, pursued by the triumphant Romanians. Reserves were dispatched from Birkenberg in vain – they were scattered by Romanian artillery fire before they could provide any aid. The Romanian masses pressed incessantly against the thinned ranks of 89th Infantry Division. Every attempt to take up a firm position was in vain. They were driven back from the high ground into Jakobsdorf and Henndorf in the Haarbach valley. General von Morgen was powerless to hold back this Romanian assault! Then, the Romanians desisted from their pursuit, gathered together their prisoners, captured weapons and other booty, and pulled back to the high ground behind them.[427]

Many German officers described how Romanian attacks were often preceded by clear signs of what was coming – the Germans could often hear Romanian officers haranguing their troops, and then the assault would begin accompanied by bugles and cheering, all of which served to alert the defenders. On this occasion, however, the Romanian charge threatened to sweep away the German line, and it was only through lack of reserves that the attack was called off. Nevertheless, by the end of the day, the Germans were back in their start line, having suffered heavy losses. Immediately to the south, the northern flank of Schmettow's cavalry corps also ran into a determined enemy and failed to make any progress. Morgen's chief of staff doubted whether the two divisions of I Reserve Corps would be able to hold their positions if the Romanians attacked again the following day, but Morgen refused to withdraw. Falkenhayn decided that it was worth taking the risk of not reinforcing I Reserve Corps and ordered XXXIX Reserve Corps to concentrate its forces south of the Olt in order to create sufficient local force to break the Romanian line.

To the surprise of the German commanders, the Romanians did not follow up their success against Morgen's I Reserve Corps. Instead, they took advantage of the check that they had inflicted upon Morgen and began to withdraw to the east, pursued by XXXIX Reserve Corps and *Kavalleriekorps Schmettow*. However, the unexpected Romanian withdrawal prevented the Germans from pinning down their opponents, and both sides laboured along mountain roads in intermittent heavy rain. An artillery NCO described the pursuit:

> Our battery was marching with the vanguard. Suddenly, an order! We moved forward at a trot past the infantry, who cheered us as we passed. The regimental staff was already at the eastern end of Buscum and the commander ordered the battery to fire on the railway station at Sinka. One could see with the naked eye a locomotive puffing its smoke into the sky in a leisurely manner. 'Shells at

5500m: fire!' The explosions were too short! '6000m!' Still too short. Feverishly, the limber trails were dug in. '6300m!' Again, too short. Such bad luck. The regiment commander spoke: 'The battery will gallop immediately behind the village and then to the front to take up positions to fire on the train.' We limbered up, pulled out of the field, back along the road, then galloped forwards. The horses ran like they were possessed by the devil. There was an unearthly frenzy, as if the animals knew what was required. The limbers were thrown about. The observers' wagon was often on two wheels. I felt I was between life and death, clinging grimly to the top. The vehicles raced out of the village at intervals of between 30 and 40m. Shortly after leaving the village, an ammunition wagon overturned. The gunners flew high through the air over the roadside ditch into the field. The wild chase went on into the village of Garkaicza. The inhabitants stared out from behind their doors and windows in terror. It must have seemed strange how the first Germans entered their village. On over the bridge over the stream: the handrail was torn away! Onwards still along the village road. There, finally the exit, and now: 'Halt!'

The horses were white with sweat, their flanks heaving and their mouths foaming. We had to deploy in a small hill, half-right from us. We made heavy progress straight across the fields. We climbed up onto the hill, but the train had meanwhile vanished. But as we glanced around we could barely believe our eyes: looking forwards, the ground was heaving with Romanian infantry and baggage wagons moving towards the Geisterwald from the village of Sinka. So, onwards! Oberleutnant Sachs gave each gun its individual target. The first shots landed right in their midst. Panic erupted. Maddened horses galloped off with wagons through the meadows and fields of the village. A tangle developed at the entrance to the village, which dispersed rapidly as we bracketed it. The right flank gun fired on Hill 617 against enemy infantry advancing towards us in a firing line. This gun spat out truly rapid fire against the hill. The Romanians were driven from the hill twice, but as soon as our fire stopped, one saw them coming back over the hill. One of the middle guns brought an enemy headquarters in a cornfield under fire and swiftly scattered it. The battery was engulfed in a deafening noise from the constant firing. New targets were spotted again and again. The *Oberleutnant* ran from gun to gun and constantly assigned new targets. The diminishing ammunition stocks were meanwhile replenished from the rounds still in the limbers. But it would not last long – the stockpile shrank like snow in sunshine. Desperate requests for further ammunition sent back down the line were unsuccessful; the munitions column was still far away in the other villages and could not come forward as the roads were blocked.

> In the meantime, the Romanians came to their senses. An enemy battery deployed against us. We could see it firing and returned fire. The shells landed well, but then a disaster: we were out of ammunition. We had to give up the promising duel. It was desperate! Once more men were dispatched to the rear to seek out ammunition and returned empty-handed. The few remaining rounds in the battery had to be held back as a lancer patrol that reached us reported the advance of enemy infantry against our right flank. Soon bullets flew through the battery from the right. All firearms to be made ready! Everyone took shelter behind the guns and waited with revolvers, rifles and hand grenades. Endless minutes while the enemy artillery fired salvoes at us. We were plastered with mud up to our ears. It doesn't need words to imagine how we huddled in our positions without ammunition. Then fortunately our first infantry line, which we had overtaken an hour ago, appeared and moved forward through the battery.[428]

It was only late on 4 October – after two days of marching – that Staabs was able to report that he had encountered a new Romanian defensive line on the western slopes of the Perşani Ridge amongst the trees of the forests known to the Germans and Austrians as the Geisterwald.

This was a region of few good roads, and congestion began to play a part in German calculations. In order to relieve this problem, Falkenhayn decided to pull parts of Schmettow's cavalry out of their current position and to transfer them north behind Morgen's corps so that they could operate on the extreme northern flank of Ninth Army. Meanwhile, the first elements of the *k.u.k.* 8th Mountain Brigade, which had been assigned to Falkenhayn's command, were now arriving in Hermannstadt, and were ordered to move along the Olt valley as fast as possible to take up positions on the southern flank of Ninth Army. In addition, Falkenhayn was both relieved and delighted to learn that 7th Bavarian Infantry Division and two further *k.u.k.* mountain brigades were also en route to him as reinforcements; however, the relief turned to irritation when the Bavarian troops were diverted elsewhere before they could reach Transylvania.

Ninth Army moved forward to attack the Romanian line in the Geisterwald on 5 October. After several days of rain, it was a cold, frosty day with low mist that delayed the commencement of XXXIX Reserve Corps' advance. Nevertheless, the initial attack succeeded in ascending the steep slope and overran the Romanian positions without apparent difficulty, but before they could exploit their gains, the Germans had to beat off a series of powerful Romanian counterattacks. Leutnant Breuer of 252nd Infantry Regiment was in the midst of the fighting:

> Early on 5 October our artillery that had concentrated during the night opened fire in a hellish concert that we had not experienced for a long time. Meanwhile, I Battalion worked its way forward behind the railway embankment, then slowly advanced over an open field to the slope of Hill 620. But towards midday, while all our guns were still blazing away at the fortifications, the Romanians launched a counterattack. Dense masses gathered behind the slopes and surged against us. It was an extraordinary experience to see these reckless, death-defying concentrated groups crushed by the terrible effect of our artillery and infantry fire. One could see how direct hits from our howitzers tore wide holes, which they repeatedly filled. But our artillery fire was too strong and its effect was so dreadful that this attack and two further attacks were completely smashed. The slopes were strewn with shell craters and covered with dead and wounded. During the afternoon, when the fire of the artillery had risen to a crescendo, we stormed forward against the heights with a cheer behind the firestorm. There was no more firing from the enemy. Those who were still alive in the enemy positions threw away their weapons in fear. The attacking companies stormed a bloody and gruesome defence line: churned up ground, shattered corpses, the dead and the groaning wounded, amongst them the survivors who had held on in this hellish cauldron to the last.[429]

Generalleutnant Hugo Elstermann von Elster, the commander of 76th Reserve Infantry Division, watched Romanian infantry advancing in their counterattack:

> The first enemy infantry wave slowly came down the western slope of Hill 620, and a second and third followed at short intervals. Gradually, the enemy attack lines extended themselves to both sides. Ever more infantry came forward, offering a rich target for the artillery. There was an unnatural stillness in the command post. Despite the calm, my heart beat faster than before. When we concluded that there were enough targets in front of us, the tension-releasing order to the artillery to open fire was given: the storm broke! An ear-shattering heavy artillery fire from field guns, howitzers and mortars commenced with a crash. As the wind blew away the clouds of smoke and dust, one could see the Romanians running helplessly hither and thither under the iron hail, seeking shelter. One saw them fall or run back and forth desperately. Others hastily rushed over the crest to seek shelter in the dead ground.
>
> For a soldier it was an outstanding and satisfactory sight, but a grim one for a man. But despite the destructive fire some of the Romanians advanced with admirable tenacity and determination; one must acknowledge that. Relatively few

> pushed up to within 50m of the railway embankment where they were killed by accurate rifle and machine-gun fire. The following day, I saw rows of dead lying on the railway embankment near Sinka.[430]

Despite the success of Falkenhayn's assault and the undoubted losses suffered by the Romanians, the haul of prisoners was small compared to comparable battles against the Russians. Falkenhayn attributed this to the ability of the Romanians to scatter and fade away into the mountains, but it was also due in part to the speed with which the Romanians conducted their withdrawal. The determined Romanian counterattacks and the ruggedness of the terrain left the Germans too tired to conduct an immediate pursuit, and determined rearguard actions forced Falkenhayn's units to display caution. Nevertheless, there was great dismay in *MCG* about the setback, and Crăiniceanu was dismissed from command of Second Army and replaced by Averescu, who was now available following the abandonment of the Flămânda crossing.

The next major objective for Falkenhayn was the town of Braşov, or Kronstadt as it was known to the Germans. The city had been a centre of the Transylvanian Saxon community for nearly 800 years, but by the 17th century the Romanian population was increasingly vocal about demanding its rights. In 1910, a census showed that of the 41,000 inhabitants, 26 per cent were Germans, 29 per cent were Romanians, and the rest were Hungarians; nevertheless, the Romanians loudly celebrated the arrival of Romanian troops in early September. Now, *MCG* was concerned that Braşov might be abandoned prematurely. Two of the divisions that had earlier been transferred south for the Flămânda operation were en route to reinforce Second Army, but it was questionable whether they would arrive in time to allow Braşov to be held. However, Falkenhayn became aware that the Romanian reinforcements were on their way, and concluded that this made it all the more important for his numerically inferior army to press on while attacks were still possible. The capture of Braşov was important, but even more vital was to secure the valleys leading from the city into Romania – if these could be seized, a sizable part of the Romanian Second Army could be destroyed. As he issued orders for a further advance, Falkenhayn received a message from higher authorities:

> After I had given orders for these operations [the advance to and beyond Braşov], an order arrived from *OHL* from the kaiser, the details of which I no longer remember, but whose gist was that Ninth Army must hasten its movements. The tacit criticism in this telegram did not trouble me. I knew that I had done my duty. But it was not clear to me then or now that the supreme war commander

> really had so little insight that he called into question the efforts of my troops. To doubt them, after they had been in constant combat for more than 14 days in the most difficult terrain or struggling over unbelievable roads, after almost unfeasibly brilliant successes, after exertions that could not have been greater, was an injustice of the worse kind, of which the kaiser would never have been guilty, with his unerring sense of justice. There was nothing else to do other than simply to consign the telegram to the archives, as with the best will in the world it was not possible to increase our efforts.[431]

Leaving aside Falkenhayn's perhaps inflated opinion of the kaiser's sense of justice, it is interesting to speculate on the role that Falkenhayn's enemies in German military circles might have played in briefing the kaiser about events in Transylvania. There is not a trace of criticism of Falkenhayn in Ludendorff's post-war memoirs, which makes the kaiser's telegram all the more curious. There is a clear implication in Falkenhayn's account that he believed the kaiser's 'unerring sense of justice' might have been derailed by misinformation.

As Ninth Army approached Braşov on 7 October, some elements ran into Romanian defensive positions. The biggest problem faced by the Germans was the terrain and the limited number of roads; it was relatively simple for the Romanians to block and defend the few roads through the mountains around Braşov. An attempt by 187th Infantry Division to advance immediately north of the city triggered a determined Romanian counterattack, and as Falkenhayn later wrote, although the counterattack was broken up by German artillery fire, it indicated the intention of the Romanians to make a stand in the area. Although elements of 187th Infantry Division penetrated into the northern part of the city, they encountered further determined resistance and counterattacks throughout the following night. Early on 8 October, 51st *Honvéd* Infantry Division moved up in support and attacked the high ground that dominated the western and northern parts of Braşov. Once this area was secure, the Romanian position in the city itself would be untenable.

By the end of the day, it was clear to the Romanians that Braşov could not be held, and rear area units were ordered to withdraw, followed by the rearguard. Falkenhayn had ordered Morgen's I Reserve Corps to outflank the city to the north and then sweep down into the rear of the defenders, but hindered as much by poor roads and difficult terrain as by Romanian resistance, the German infantry was unable to cut the escape route. Nevertheless, the last major location captured with such euphoria by the Romanians in their initial advance into Transylvania was back in the control of the Central Powers. Averescu, who had just arrived to take up his new post, had been ordered by *MCG* to defend a new line that would stop the Germans from penetrating into the passes that led from the Braşov area into Romania, but he rejected this. Instead, he insisted that he would have to withdraw into the passes themselves, where the German advantage in artillery would be greatly reduced.

The Romanian invasion of Transylvania, begun with such high hopes and expectations at the end of August, had been completely reversed by Falkenhayn's series of attacks. Although his forces were numerically inferior to those he faced, he used his advantage in artillery to good effect, and the battle-hardened skills of his troops proved to be more than adequate to compensate for the Romanian numerical advantage. The abandonment of all gains in Transylvania caused morale in Bucharest to plunge still further. There were chaotic preparations to move the seat of government to the east, and some began to question the wisdom of going to war with the Central Powers. But although there were suggestions that it might be time to seek a separate peace, Brătianu and the king remained determined to fight on. German diplomatic moves – via Denmark – to secure the toppling of Brătianu's government and its replacement by a pro-German administration came to nothing.

Despite the disappointing haul of prisoners, Falkenhayn was confident that he had inflicted significant damage on the Romanian Second Army and that it would not be able to put up serious resistance, even with the reinforcements that it was receiving from the abandoned Flămânda operation. Although he continued to receive (often contradictory) messages from *OHL* about further reinforcements, Falkenhayn prudently decided to proceed on the basis of the troops that he already had available rather than waiting for additional formations that might or might not arrive. The initial purpose of his campaign – to expel the Romanians from Transylvania and thus eliminate the threat of a deep penetration into Hungary – had been achieved. He now wished to secure crossings over the Carpathians before winter brought all such operations to an end. During the first winter of the war, he had watched with growing exasperation as the *k.u.k.* Army attempted to force its way across the northern part of the Carpathians to relieve the besieged fortress of Przemyśl, and he had no intention of repeating the mistakes that Conrad had made. If the passes into Romania were to be forced, it had to be done rapidly, before further Romanian forces could be deployed and before winter in the mountains made logistic and military movements impossible.

Both *OHL* and *AOK* wanted to concentrate on the passes that led from Transylvania to the east and northeast into Moldavia, in order to improve links with the *k.u.k.* forces on the Eastern Front, but Falkenhayn disagreed. He felt that with the forces he had available, he would achieve more by concentrating on the passes to the south of Braşov into Wallachia, i.e. the Romanian heartland. During the Transylvanian campaign, he had been assigned overall command of both his army and Arz's First Army, though the weakness of the latter had made this of limited value; now, there was a further change of command, with both the German Ninth Army and the *k.u.k.* First Army becoming part of Archduke Karl's army group. Falkenhayn had no choice but to comply with the orders of his superiors, but he did all he could to ensure that his main effort would be towards the south, in order to open the way for a thrust into Wallachia. This was possible largely because he was instructed both by *OHL* and his new army group commander to clear the pass into Moldavia with only the *k.u.k.* 71st Infantry Division while Schmettow's cavalry corps stood ready to exploit its success; there was little advantage to be gained by deploying more substantial forces, as the constraints of terrain meant that they would not be able to exert any additional leverage.

The German and Austro-Hungarian troops under Falkenhayn's command were now reorganised into different groups to force the mountain passes. With a force that consisted of the *Alpenkorps* and the *k.u.k.* 2nd and 10th Mountain Brigades, Krafft was to break through the Olt Pass south of Hermannstadt. Morgen's I Reserve Corps would consist of 76th Reserve Infantry Division and 8th *k.u.k.* Mountain Brigade, and would attempt to force the Törzburger Pass (Bran Pass to the Romanians) southwest of Braşov in order to open the road to Câmpulung; Staabs' XXXIX Reserve Corps would consist of 51st *Honvéd* Infantry Division and 187th Infantry Division and would attack the Tömöser and Altschanz Passes to the south and southwest of Braşov; 89th Infantry Division was to secure the Bodza Pass to the east of Braşov; and Schmettow's cavalry corps, reinforced by the *k.u.k.* 71st Infantry Division, were pushed northeast in accordance with the wishes of *OHL* and *AOK*. This plan clearly dispersed the forces of Ninth Army on diverging axes, but the terrain made this inevitable – the roads and landscape in any single direction meant that the opportunities for large-scale manoeuvres were very limited.

Whilst the mountains and their narrow passes presented a formidable barrier to the Germans, there were so many passes that it was difficult for the Romanians to deploy sufficient troops to defend every route. The problems were compounded by poor intelligence about German strengths and dispositions, and moreover the primitive communications – both in terms of signalling and lateral movement – between the different Romanian armies prevented rapid reaction to any German advance. However, even in the face of a weakened enemy, the forcing of the mountain passes would be a difficult operation for Falkenhayn's army. Morgen described the terrain that his men faced:

> The pass road, almost 50km [30 miles] long, is tactically difficult to travel. At some points, the terrain on either side falls steeply several hundred metres, and at others the road winds through deep ravines. The pass is easy to defend everywhere and cannot be forced frontally by an attacker, particularly if the defender … uses the terrain skilfully and strengthens it with field fortifications. The Austrians had made no preparations to defend the pass.
>
> The only way of opening the pass was to bypass it. Neither of the two German divisions was equipped for this. Their troops lacked the essential mountain boots and pack animals. The towed artillery was confined to the pass road. The guns themselves could not be used there as their firing trajectories were too flat. If I hadn't had the Austrian mountain brigade, we would not have been able to advance through the Törzburger Pass. This brigade had 3,000 beasts of burden, which were skilfully loaded and led by experienced mountaineers. Thus 8th Mountain Brigade was the key to opening the pass. Along mule tracks and over trackless mountains, it would move against the flanks and rear of the enemy and manoeuvre him out of his positions. Only in this manner were the Romanians forced from the mountains in protracted operations and combat and pushed back into the Câmpulung basin.[432]

The intrepid men of 8th Mountain Brigade outflanked the Romanian defences along the road by marching through the mountains to the west, while Morgen's German infantry thrust down the road itself. Rather than risk being surrounded, the Romanians pulled back, and by 12 October, Morgen had succeeded in clearing the pass. However, the success was incomplete, as there was a second ridge to the south of Câmpulung – the road into Wallachia would only be open once the town and the mountains beyond had been captured. Meanwhile, the attempt to link up with Austro-Hungarian forces in Moldavia ran into difficulties. Attacking on 14 October, 71st Infantry Division succeeded in advancing across the frontier into Romania but then ran into the Romanian 15th Infantry Division, which was led with energy and skill by General Eremia Grigorescu, who had trained extensively in France before the war. In costly fighting, Grigorescu was able to drive the *k.u.k.* troops back over the frontier, a small victory to offset against the almost continuous series of disasters that had befallen Romania's forces.

XXXIX Reserve Corps was involved in heavy fighting on 10 October, but made use of slightly easier terrain than that faced by I Reserve Corps to make good initial progress. The Tömöser Pass (Predeal Pass to the Romanians) was protected near its northern entrance by Predeal, and the town was subjected to a heavy German artillery bombardment in mid-October; many of the Romanian political elite owned large properties in Predeal, and some of these were subjected to particularly intense fire, at least partly because their owners had been prominent amongst those who had advocated Romania's entry into the war against the Central Powers. The town itself was seized in heavy fighting that continued until 25 October. The defenders pulled back into the pass itself, where they took up positions that could not be broken; the terrain greatly restricted the use of artillery, removing the main asset that the Central Powers possessed. Both sides were forced to resort to frontal attacks, which resulted in steadily rising losses but had no impact on the front line.

Inevitably, given the past history of the various personalities and their long feud, there continued to be difficulties between Falkenhayn on the one hand and Ludendorff and Hindenburg at *OHL* on the other:

> On 14 October [*OHL*] signalled that the kaiser acknowledged the advance of I Reserve Corps with praise and hoped that XXXIX Reserve Corps would be led with the same vigour – a very sharp criticism … The unjustness of the praise for the leadership of I Reserve Corps and the criticism of that of XXXIX Reserve Corps struck me particularly deeply. I did not pass the telegram on to the corps commands, but drew the attention of *OHL* to the fact that I Reserve Corps had not succeeded due to the merits of its command, but rather purely through the timely outflanking by 8th *k.u.k.* Mountain Brigade. This was not possible for XXXIX Reserve Corps; outflanking movements in that sector were very difficult. The corps had achieved just as much as its neighbour.[433]

It should be remembered that Curt von Morgen, the commander of I Reserve Corps, had spent the war under the command of Ludendorff and Hindenburg at *Ober Ost*, and it can be argued that they continued to be favourably inclined towards their former subordinate. In a similar manner, Falkenhayn appears to have been determined to prevent someone he identified as being from the *Ober Ost* faction from being singled out for praise, particularly when this was linked with criticism of another commander. And of course, any such criticism of a corps commander would reflect upon the army commander.

Further west, Krafft moved against the Romanians in and around the Olt Pass. The battered Olt Corps that had been driven back from Hermannstadt in disarray had reorganised and been reinforced by troops released by the abandonment of the Flămânda operation. A scratch division with largely German leadership but mainly Austro-Hungarian troops began the attack by attempting to outflank the defences to the east of the pass, and at first succeeded in making good progress through the mountains until they ran into a determined counterattack north of Sălătruc. One German account attributes some of the Romanian counterattack's success to complacency amongst the Germans, but whatever the reason, most of the Germans' gains were rapidly reversed. The difficulties of operating in the mountains were later described by Major Liefeld of 76th Infantry Regiment:

> What is involved in such troop movements in the mountains is hard to conceive from the safety of one's house. A couple of days before, my company and I were assigned to a battalion that was involved in tough fighting with the Romanians in the heights. First, we had to reach them. Can one really comprehend what a devilish labour it is to climb a mountain as high as the Brocken [the highest part of the Harz range in Germany, 3,740 feet or 1,140m] at night with rifle and backpack? As dusk fell I had to go up the mountain and then led the company – it is a mountain with a bare, stony summit – along a ridge where there was no track or road and one was in danger of slipping at every step. Meanwhile, it had grown dark and was raining, and one could see no more than two paces ahead, but the battalion must have moved further forward. We therefore spent the entire night on the slope. We officers had left our coats on a packhorse that naturally couldn't follow us; now we were soaked through and had neither blankets, nor coats, nor tents. What could we do? Nothing! Schneider and I finally lay on the ground and a sergeant gave us a coat, which we spread over ourselves; we were then able to doze. Our legs hurt from the intense cold; despite that, one drifted off to sleep, and by morning we must have slept a couple of hours, as when I was summoned and I lifted off the coat, the sky was light and the sun was shining. It was about 6am. One was so stiff and cold that one couldn't move. During the night, I expected most of the men would be ill and that I too would have suffered. But it wasn't the case. Everything soon dried in the warm sunshine, the lads with the horses who had been looking for us since 4 a.m. arrived with our coats, and we found a haystack in which we lay down and as the field kitchen delivered breakfast to us, the night was forgotten. Not a single man reported sick.[434]

As was the case with the passes to the south of Braşov, fighting degenerated into a series of bloody attacks and counterattacks until exhaustion forced both sides to pause for breath. The French had sent a military mission to Romania headed by General Henri Berthelot to provide guidance and expertise to the newest member of the Entente. He had already concluded that any possibility of Romania's entry into the war bringing about a swift collapse of Austria-

Hungary had long vanished, and instead he pinned his hopes on halting the forces of the Central Powers in the Carpathians, where the growing rigours of winter would deplete their strength while the Romanian Army was retrained, re-equipped and turned into a more competent fighting force. With Falkenhayn's troops generally stalled in the mountains, it seemed as if his policy might succeed. However, the multitude of passes through the Carpathians and the German setback in trying to open a route to Moldavia ultimately proved to be the undoing of the hope of creating a stalemate in the mountains. With no prospect of success to the northeast of Braşov, Falkenhayn was able to dispatch Schmettow's cavalry corps to the Jiu valley, west of the Olt Pass, together with substantial infantry in the form of the Bavarian 11th Infantry Division, an Austrian mountain brigade, and a mountain battalion from Württemberg. Overall command of this group lay in the hands of the Bavarian General Paul Ritter von Kneussl.

The first step of forcing this route involved securing control of the Vulcan Pass, which had already been the scene of heavy fighting. Before all his troops had assembled, Kneussl attacked on 23 October, rapidly overwhelming the first line of resistance. When news of the fighting reached him, General Culcer, commander of the Romanian First Army, had no reserves to send to help his hard-pressed subordinates; he appealed to *MCG* for help, or permission to retreat, and was promptly dismissed from command. His replacement was General Ioan Dragalina, who had commanded the Romanian 1st Infantry Division at the beginning of the war. Arriving at his new command with strict instructions to hold his positions, Dragalina threatened any who withdrew with dire consequences. He immediately departed for a tour of the front line, but drove into an area where the Germans had already advanced. His car came under heavy gunfire and he was badly wounded in his arm; although he was evacuated to Bucharest where his arm was amputated, he developed a wound infection and died.

Morale in the Jiu valley plummeted with the death of Dragalina. On 27 October, Schmettow's cavalry was ordered forward to exploit what was expected to be an imminent breakthrough into Wallachia, but the leading elements of Kneussl's command had overreached themselves. With little overall supervision, the local Romanian commanders launched a series of energetic counterattacks that first halted the Germans, and then drove them back in increasing disorder. Finally, Kneussl had no choice but to pull back to a line north of the pre-war frontier; although the mountain passes remained in his hands, a decisive breakthrough had eluded him.

One of the officers who led his men into the fighting in the Jiu valley was a young *Oberleutnant* from Württemberg named Erwin Rommel:

> We climbed up along a small footpath. Our packs were heavy with four days' rations. We had no pack animals or winter clothing. The officers too had to carry rucksacks. It took us hours to ascend the steep slope. A few men and an officer who had been in combat on the other side of the mountain in a Bavarian formation came down the path. They told us that they had had a very tough time in fighting in the mist. The Romanians had overwhelmed most of their comrades in close-quarter combat. For several days, the few survivors had wandered hungry through the trackless mountain forests before finally crossing the frontier. They described the Romanians as very wild and dangerous opponents.
>
> It began to rain as we started to climb without the help of any guide. The rain grew heavier as night fell and it was soon pitch black. The cold rain turned into a cloudburst and soaked us to the skin. Further progress up the steep, rocky slope was impossible, and we camped on either side of the mule track at an altitude of about 1500m [4950 feet]. It was impossible to lie down and we were soaked through, and the rain defeated every attempt to kindle a fire. We crouched close together, wrapped in blankets and shelter halves and shivered in the cold. When the rain slackened, we again tried to build a fire, but the wet pine just smoked and gave off no heat. The minutes of that dreadful night crept by slowly. After midnight the rain ceased, but in its place an icy wind made it impossible for us to relax in our wet clothes. We stamped around the smoking fire, freezing. Finally, it became light enough for us to continue the climb toward Hill 1794 and we soon reached the snowline.
>
> When we reached the summit our clothes and packs were frozen to our backs. It was below zero and an icy wind swept the snowy summit of Hill 1794. We couldn't find our positions. The telephone section sheltered in a small hole in the ground, barely large enough for ten men. To the right was a group of about fifty horses. Shortly after we arrived, a blizzard enveloped the high ground and reduced visibility to a few metres.
>
> Father Gössler [captain and commander of 5 Coy] knew, as an experienced mountaineer, what was entailed in deploying troops without accommodation and firewood in this weather. His suggestion to pull back the company to a sheltered position was answered by the sector commander with the threat that he would bring before a court martial anyone who conceded even a square metre of ground! Orders are orders – a second night in an icy storm and bitter cold followed in the high mountains. It seemed to go on without end and drained away our last

> strength. The exhausted guards stared out into the darkness with streaming eyes. Anyone who fell asleep from exhaustion was shaken awake by his comrades. The men on Hill 1794 just had to grit their teeth …
>
> We did not succeed in lighting a fire. Despite numerous cases of fever and collapse during the evening, further requests [to withdraw] yielded no response from the sector commander. The cold grew ever more biting. Soon the men stopped retiring to their tents and as in the preceding night tried to stay warm by moving around. When day broke, the doctor had to send forty men to the field hospital. I was tasked by Hauptmann Gössler to go to the sector command to describe personally the state of the troops. When I returned, Hauptmann Gössler was determined to pull back immediately with the rest of the company, come what may. By now, 90 per cent were under medical care due to the cold and illness.[435]

As fighting continued in the Carpathian passes, Mackensen attacked the forces in eastern Dobruja, correctly calculating that their futile efforts to attack and link up with the Flămânda bridgehead would have weakened the Romanians. With no further requirement to redirect the German 217th Infantry Division to the line of the Danube, Mackensen had, for the first time in the current campaign, a sizable body of German troops at his disposal. Nevertheless, he had concerns about the planned attack, as he recorded in his diary on 7 October:

> With inadequate resources, I am to complete an operation that began well and am daily made aware of new facts that call into question the desired outcome. At Tutrakan and Silistria, surprise added to the strength of my forces. This factor is no longer part of the reckoning. The reinforcements assigned to me are arriving very slowly. In part, they are coming from far afield and the rest are hindered by the poor Bulgarian railway system. These are the Bulgarians and Turks. What a lucky general, to have only German troops! My opponent is also being reinforced in numbers and the construction of positions. The difficulties that have to be overcome here are not acknowledged at all by our high command. But my confidence remains unshaken.[436]

To an extent, Mackensen was overstating the matter. He must have known from aerial reconnaissance, for example, that the defensive lines were largely of very rudimentary construction and would not pose serious obstacles to his troops. He ordered Toshev, commanding the western half of the front, to pin the Romanian and Russian forces in their positions while he personally supervised the attack in the eastern half. The original intention was to attack on 11 October, but there were repeated delays due to the slow arrival of reinforcements. Finally starting on 19 October, the German artillery first silenced the Romanian guns and then proceeded to shell the defending infantry and inflicted heavy losses. But when the Bulgarian and German infantry moved forward, they still met determined resistance, particularly from the Serbian division that the Russians had sent to Dobruja. However, Toshev's force, intended to do no more than pin down the enemy, made rapid progress. Two Turkish divisions broke through in the central part of Toshev's sector, and there were gains everywhere – even in parts where the line was defended by Russians – except close to the Danube, where the guns of the Romanian monitors provided vital fire support for the defenders.

Mackensen and Toshev quickly agreed to change the emphasis of the original attack, especially as the only part of the eastern sector that had made any significant progress was the Bulgarian cavalry operating along the coast. However, the pressure of the fighting began to tell on the defences in front of the German 217th Infantry Division and there were widespread gains on the second day of the assault. Mackensen had moved his headquarters close to the front line, and now moved forward again to keep up with the advance:

> I advanced from my hill north of Topraisar to a new area of high ground that had apparently served as a headquarters for a Romanian staff during the battle. As I reached it, an artillery battery moved forward to its left and to the right the Bulgarian cavalry trotted up and I had a quick exchange of reports and orders with their battle-proven commander, General Kolev. A light mist lay over the wide fields so that the line on the map ran right in front of us along Trajan's Wall [an ancient series of earthworks often attributed incorrectly to the Roman emperor Trajan] could more be guessed at than seen. The rearguard only tried to take up positions in front of a single petroleum tank further inland that was visible through the haze. The very first shot from the artillery battery struck the tank. A huge flame soared into the sky and turned into a great black cloud, which stretched away to the east like a huge flag. The enemy disappeared. He abandoned the broad lowland … where the railway from Cernavoda to Constanța ran … The fog lifted and everything unveiled itself like a mirage, with Constanța and her white minarets and buildings swimming up before our eyes out of the fog. The Russian Black Sea Fleet fled from her harbour for the high sea. One could see the flashes of the ships' broadsides through the haze that still lay on the water, but the shells reached neither us nor the troops advancing through Tuzla to Constanța on the extreme right flank.
>
> I will never forget the impression that these scenes made. I had already been able to observe the fighting of the preceding days with my own eyes. How unusual

> for the commander of an army in war to be present, what satisfaction for my soldierly sentiments: combat on land and sea, all weapons active and moving. Before me was Constanța, rising white from the mist, with plumes of smoke risking from the coast. And what was more, the sensation of victory on the birthday of Her Majesty the Kaiserin! All troops have given their best for the victory. The Turks have fought well too. It was a competition between the three nationalities, while on the other side the Russians and Romanians came to blows trying to escape …
>
> There is much to do. My thoughts are now wandering from Dobruja and on to – Bucharest![437]

Zayontchovsky had been promised additional reinforcements in the shape of IV Siberian Corps, and had hoped that he would be able to defend the existing line until these troops arrived. Over the next two days, this hope evaporated as the line collapsed everywhere. Constanța, the main Romanian port on the coast of the Black Sea, was choked with wounded and stragglers, and even if there had been an attempt at orderly evacuation, it is unlikely that it would have succeeded. Instead, everyone was left to fend for himself. When he became aware that several foreign consuls were stranded in the town, a British merchant captain took it upon himself to steam into the port to collect them, withdrawing safely under artillery fire as the Bulgarians and Germans occupied Constanța. Little was done to destroy the valuable oil storage tanks, which fell into German hands intact.[438]

By the beginning of November, the pursuit of the defeated Romanians – carried out largely by the Bulgarian cavalry – was brought to an end as much by bad weather as by any resurgence of Romanian resistance. At the same time, relations between the Germans and Bulgarians began to deteriorate. Much as they had in Serbia, the Germans intended to ensure that their commercial interests gained the most from gains in Dobruja, and took control of the railways in the territory that had been overrun. The Bulgarians had expected this to be their right, and protested by deliberately delaying German train movements through Bulgaria. Other disputes ranged from substantial to ridiculous. Both the Germans and Bulgarians had expected to profit from the capture of Romanian oil and grain in Constanța, and the refusal of the Germans to share the spoils caused much anger in Sofia. Rather more absurd was an argument about a statue in Constanța. In ancient times, before it was renamed in honour of Constantia, the half-sister of the Roman Emperor Constantine, the city had been known as Tomis and was the home of the poet Ovid after he was exiled from Rome. He made no secret of his dislike of his place of exile, describing it as 'a town located in a war-stricken cultural wasteland on the remotest margins of the empire', but long after his death, a statue of Ovid was erected in the town in 1887. After the city fell to Mackensen's troops, a group of Romanian looters removed the statue; Mackensen promptly dispatched German troops to apprehend the looters and return the statue to its traditional location outside the town hall.

Eventually, high-level discussions in Sofia settled the disputes over economic exploitation of Dobruja, but relations between Mackensen and the Bulgarian General Toshev had now deteriorated to the level where it was impossible for the men to continue working together. In a face-saving move, the Bulgarians appointed him military governor of Macedonia and removed him from command of Third Army, replacing him with General Stefan Nerezov.

Although the Bulgarians were content with overrunning Dobruja, Mackensen was keen to press on across the Danube as soon as possible. *OHL* was keen to bring the campaign against Romania to a successful conclusion before winter set in, and Falkenhayn too had no intention of allowing his troops to be stuck in the inhospitable mountains. However, he continued to feel frustrated at what he regarded as interference from *OHL*:

> On 16 October [*OHL*] advised that 10th Bavarian Infantry Division would not come to Ninth Army but to First *k.u.k.* Army. Apparently one feared a Russian-Romanian attack there. A report on 19 October then added that only the staff of an infantry brigade and one infantry regiment from 8th Bavarian Infantry Division would remain with Ninth Army, specifically for service in the *Alpenkorps*, and the rest had to go to First *k.u.k.* Army. At least an infantry regiment was to be removed from 11th Bavarian Infantry Division, which was intended to detrain at Szurduk, and also was to serve with the *Alpenkorps*. By way of explanation, it was added that it was anticipated that the right flank of First *k.u.k.* Army would attack alongside Ninth Army.[439]

In these circumstances, with Falkenhayn dependent upon cooperation with a neighbouring army over which he had no control, it seemed impossible for the commander of Ninth Army to continue his widespread pressure along the southern Carpathian passes. It also represented a further diversion of force away from Bucharest, the capture of which Falkenhayn felt was the only way to bring the campaign to a speedy conclusion; moreover, despite the assurance that Arz's First Army would cooperate with Falkenhayn's army, the reality was that the two armies would be attempting to advance along diverging axes, rather than concentrating their strength. Falkenhayn's original intention had been to apply pressure at several different points in the Carpathians and then to exploit a success wherever it was achieved, but this was no longer possible, and in any event had not succeeded.

Instead, Falkenhayn decided to break the deadlock by forcing the western end of the Romanian line, in the Jiu valley. He reasoned that of all the points at which his troops had attempted to make progress, this was the route that was most favourable for the deployment of substantial forces – the valleys elsewhere were too narrow for the Germans to make best use of their superiority in firepower. To this end, Falkenhayn increased the strength of *Gruppe Kneussl* to include Schmettow's cavalry, 41st and 109th Infantry Divisions, and the Württemberg Mountain Battalion. The infantry component was designated LIV Corps, commanded by General Victor Kühne, and the total strength of the force – forty infantry battalions with strong cavalry support – greatly outnumbered the opposing Romanian forces, which amounted to perhaps eighteen battalions. In order to mislead the Romanians, there was an increase in German activity in and around Braşov, with Falkenhayn personally making several very public visits to troops and headquarters in the area. The deception was largely successful; in particular, the Romanians were confident that after the mauling they had inflicted upon the Germans in the Jiu valley at the end of October, there would be no early resumption of German pressure in this area.

The proposed start date for the new operation was 5 November, but it proved impossible to complete preparations in time. Falkenhayn continued to stifle, with varying success, his irritation at the orders he received:

> My decision did not waver when an enquiry arrived from the Front command [i.e. Archduke Karl's headquarters] on 30 October, even though that was doubtless its intention. The message read:
>
> 'The report for which Your Excellency is responsible must primarily recognise whether in view of the substantial setback suffered by *Gruppe Kneussl* and the supply difficulties described in the evening report of 29 [October] the use of the reinforcing divisions at another point may be more fruitful, and in that case should seek permission for their deployment in a different location from *OHL* via the Front command in a timely manner. Mackensen wishes to cross the Danube on 7 November.'
>
> I replied:
>
> The previous view prevails. Fighting in the mountains is difficult everywhere. It cannot be anticipated whether the deployment of the two new divisions at some other point will result in them being used with greater advantage and success than in the Szurduk area …

> Redeployment of the cavalry … is not possible in the foreseeable future due to the railway capacity required … It is not expected that the enemy will reinforce his positions in the Szurduk area, particularly when he becomes aware of Mackensen's intentions.[440]

This terse response was very much in keeping with the manner in which Falkenhayn had dealt with similar issues when he was chief of the general staff; the difference was, of course, that he was now a subordinate, not the person issuing the orders. Although his response appeared to settle the matter, further interference followed:

> Unfortunately, the Front command intervened again when *OHL* assigned 2nd Bicycle Brigade to the [Ninth] Army. Despite my strong warnings, it was ordered to deploy at Orsova, and it was claimed that a young general staff officer at *OHL* had discovered that it would be straightforward to attack there from Domogled towards Negrafu … Such an attack was absolutely impossible as it would have required the equipment of the troops with pack animals, and this had not been done. The brigade, which would have been of incalculable value to the cavalry corps, was sorely missed and didn't actually reach Orsova.[441]

Similar ill-tempered exchanges continued in the days that followed. It is probably relevant that Ludendorff's account of the fighting in the Carpathian passes describes the attacks by Krafft and Kühne, but makes no mention of Falkenhayn at all. The antagonism between the two men lasted long after the war was over.

Finally, on 11 November, German artillery began to batter the positions of the Romanian 1st Infantry Division, the main formation in the Jiu valley; a second Romanian division had tardily been assigned as reinforcements, but had yet to arrive. The operational plan was similar to that used so effectively by Morgen the previous month: the regular infantry of the German force would pressurise the Romanian defences in the valley itself, while the mountain troops – in this case, the Württemberg Mountain Battalion – would attempt to outflank the defensive line by crossing the mountains to the west. It was a bold endeavour, particularly as the weather was expected to grow more hostile, though the month of November had commenced with unusually fine weather. The march through the mountains became an extraordinary struggle against the terrain, the weather and sharp Romanian counterattacks, but the Württembergers made steady progress, though from the start they had to contend with determined Romanian attempts to disrupt their plans:

> The following day, we had to defend against an overwhelming Romanian counterattack. The green-blue uniformed soldiers charged against the German machine-guns repeatedly with hoarse shouts of 'Hurrah!' The Hungarian mountain battery demonstrated that it knew its work; it laid down accurate blocking fire in front of the defensive line of the mountain troops at very short range, and the ensign accompanied each shot with a short prayer: 'Holy Mary, help us score a direct hit!' The Romanians who advanced with desperate courage had to fall back with dreadful losses.[442]

Rommel's company found itself in difficulties when one such counterattack isolated the leading platoon and knocked out its machine-gun:

> The second platoon took up positions at a run in the village and fired on the dense masses of Romanians who were storming forward from half-left along the stream bed. At the same time the remnants of the first platoon streamed back, followed by a black mass of Romanians. Rapid fire along the entire line brought some of the pursuing Romanians to a standstill; but to right and left the enemy masses came ever closer. We now missed the heavy machine-gun that lay smashed up ahead. Those who returned from the first platoon were immediately inserted into the firing line. I hurried to the outposts either side of the bridge, confirmed everything was in order, took the heavy machine-gun that was available there, and deployed it in the threatened sector.
>
> But the Romanians did not give up. Despite their heavy losses they attacked repeatedly. Company Headquarters found itself in the firing line. Its leader, Feldwebel Dallinger, was hit in the head by a bullet. The fog continued to disperse and we had our first opportunity to assess the enemy's strength. We were also short of ammunition. The left flank was completely exposed.
>
> I reported the situation by telephone to Major Sprösser and requested urgent reinforcements. A few minutes later, Leutnant Hohl arrived at a run with about fifty men. I deployed this platoon behind the left flank with the task of defending that flank with some of its squads, leaving the bulk under my control. Shortly after, the company came up and was held at my disposal, echeloned behind the left flank. There was no further cause for concern.[443]

As they advanced through the mountain villages, the Württembergers took whatever food they could find – it was impossible for them to carry sufficient supplies with them, in addition to the ammunition and other equipment that they carried. On more than one occasion, columns of pack animals arrived carrying ammunition just as supplies were running out, and the advance continued.

In the valley itself, the unequal struggle turned decisively in favour of the Germans on 12 November; as the Romanian line collapsed, Schmettow's cavalry moved forward to exploit the success and led the way into the town of Târgu Jiu. Still unaware of the overwhelming strength of the German forces, the Romanians attempted to hold a line immediately to the south of the town, but here too they were defeated and despite worsening weather the German cavalry burst clear of the mountains on 17 November. The Romanian 1st Infantry Division was reduced to fewer than 2,000 men, and 17th Infantry Division, which had finally arrived as reinforcements, was only marginally stronger.

The performance of Schmettow's cavalry was impressive, but fell short of Falkenhayn's expectations. The mounted columns brushed aside the tattered remnants of the Romanian defences and pushed south at speed, but despite energetic leadership, the cavalry formations moved no faster than the infantry, repeatedly having to stop while fodder was brought forward. Falkenhayn could do little more than watch in frustration. The troops could be motivated by enthusiasm, sense of duty or a clear understanding of the need to put aside hunger or fatigue; by contrast, animals had to be fed and rested.[444]

Belatedly, many Romanian civilians attempted to flee the German advance, but were unceremoniously pushed off the roads; most simply turned around and returned to their homes. On 21 November, the Germans reached Craiova, Romania's second city, nearly 60 miles (100km) south of Târgu Jiu; there was no attempt at resistance, largely because there were no troops available and the civilian authorities wished to avoid unnecessary damage. The speed of the advance threatened to leave the Romanian forces to the west of Craiova, collectively known as the Cerna Detachment, isolated, and *MCG* urged them to march east with all speed, but General Berthelot, head of the French military mission, intervened. Such a retreat would allow the Central Powers complete control of the Danube, he argued, and insisted that the Cerna Detachment hold their positions. His influence and prestige – derived from being Joffre's chief of staff during the Battle of the Marne – was such that *MCG* immediately countermanded its order and issued new instructions. The Cerna Detachment was to hold out to the end, if necessary destroying its heavy equipment and fighting as partisans. Combat continued for several days before the force was broken up and overwhelmed. Some 10,000 troops were lost, without achieving anything.

Mackensen continued to prepare for a crossing of the Danube after the successful advance across Dobruja. Preparations for such an operation actually predated the outbreak of hostilities; anticipating that the Romanians would attempt to close the Danube, Conrad had moved Austro-Hungarian bridging equipment downstream and cached it on the Bulgarian shore of the river. The Svistov area had already been identified as a suitable point for a crossing, for several reasons: the river was relatively narrow, only slightly more than half a mile (0.8km); there were numerous islands in the stream where troops and equipment could assemble; there were good railway lines to the south of Svistov, vital for moving the supplies that would be needed both for a crossing and to sustain the forces that were landed on the north bank; and the south bank was wooded, providing plentiful shelter for the assault troops, with good positions for artillery to support a crossing. The contrast between the manner in which the Germans considered these factors, and the somewhat more arbitrary selection of a crossing point at Flămânda by the Romanians is striking. Svistov had been used as a crossing point during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78, but despite its eminent suitability, the Romanian forces in the region amounted to no more than minimal cover.

Regardless of his original intentions to cross the river as soon as possible after the completion of the Dobruja campaign, Mackensen was forced to postpone his plans. The Bulgarians continued to show reluctance to cooperate, and the movement of troops and equipment to the selected crossing point was repeatedly held up through a combination of the limited capacity of Bulgarian railways and deliberate obstruction. Nevertheless, tentative plans were made for a crossing on about 22 November. The commander of the German forces would be General Robert Kosch, who had commanded I Corps in East Prussia and Lithuania, winning the *Pour le Mérite* for his part in the Second Battle of the Masurian Lakes in February 1915. He then went on to command X Reserve Corps and was further decorated for his part in the invasion of Serbia in the autumn of 1915. Now, he was to secure a crossing of the Danube with 217th Infantry Division and a second division improvised from *Landsturm* units under the command of Generalmajor Karl von der Goltz. Once a bridgehead had been secured, a second wave of troops composed of the Bulgarian 1st and 12th Infantry Divisions, the Turkish 26th Infantry Division, a cavalry division composed of German and Bulgarian formations, and heavy artillery would follow.

Mackensen had concerns about the strength of the force being assembled. The German 217th Infantry Division consisted of only two infantry regiments, one of which was *Landwehr*, and an Austro-Hungarian border guard battalion. A third regiment had been transferred to the Salonika front. Goltz's division had two battalions of German *Landsturm* and four of Bulgarian reservists, with additional machine-gun formations. Although the Bulgarian 1st Infantry

Division had fought well in Dobruja, the replacement drafts that had arrived in the meantime were less well trained, and a cholera outbreak had further depleted its ranks. The Turkish division was a particular worry to Mackensen:

> Neither the external appearance nor their apparent level of training inspires confidence. Their weaponry is their best feature. It is appropriate and modern, but one doubts whether the personnel understand how to use it. I do not wish to speak of their other equipment and clothing. The most questionable aspect amongst the Turks is the shortage of officers. In addition, they must be equipped with support and supply services. They haven't even brought any field kitchens with them.[445]

Whatever his doubts about his infantry, Mackensen could take solace from the plentiful artillery at his disposal, including the guns of the Austro-Hungarian Danube Flotilla. In addition, the *k.u.k.* bridging units had already proved their worth the previous year when they had participated in the invasion of Serbia and had built several bridges across the Danube. Mackensen was also confident that he could rise to the challenge:

> Germans at home have no idea of the difficulties with which we have to struggle here. Newly arrived officers admit that repeatedly. A perfect witness to this is General Tappen, who has experienced one surprise after another. It really takes a great deal of optimism to attempt a major operation with such varied and improvised troops. A French newspaper that earlier expressed its amazement that I had succeeded in assembling an army from various elements of Germans, Bulgarians and Turks etc. that was capable of fighting to victory in Dobruja was correct when it reported that I go by the principle that difficulties exist to be overcome.[446]

When Mackensen advised *OHL* of his concerns, he received a reply from Hindenburg that would have surprised Falkenhayn: the crossing of the Danube was regarded as an operation of secondary importance. The main blow was to be dealt by Falkenhayn's Ninth Army.[447] It seems all the more remarkable, therefore, that Hindenburg and Ludendorff had reduced the forces available to Falkenhayn by diverting them to the *k.u.k.* First Army.

Even as preparations for the Danube crossing were under way, news arrived from Vienna. Franz Josef, the 86-year-old Habsburg Emperor, had contracted a cough while walking with King Ludwig III of Bavaria in the grounds of the Schönbrunn Palace. This progressed to an increasingly severe lung infection and he died on 21 November. He had come to the throne sixty-seven years before, in the aftermath of the unrest of 1848. During his rule, the Habsburg Austrian Empire was turned into the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1867, and he had reigned with impassive dignity as the fortunes of his empire and family waned slowly. The personal tragedies that littered his long life are striking: his firstborn child Sophie died shortly after her second birthday; his brother Maximilian became Emperor of Mexico in 1864 but could not sustain his rule without French help and was captured and executed by republican opponents just three years later; his only son Rudolf committed suicide after shooting his lover in 1889; and his wife Elizabeth was murdered by an Italian anarchist in 1898. Many had come to link him personally with the whole concept of the Dual Monarchy, and believed that the multi-national empire over which he had presided would not outlive his passing; now that he was dead, the gloom and war-weariness that had descended upon Vienna deepened still further.

Archduke Karl, commander of the eponymous army group at the southern end of the Eastern Front, was the heir to the throne and was immediately informed. It would take nearly a month for him to arrange affairs sufficiently to allow him to relinquish command of his army group and to return to Vienna, where in addition to assuming the status of Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary, he would also become the commander-in-chief of the *k.u.k.* Army; in the meantime, the machinery of state and war continued to grind on in its set course.

The crossing of the Danube was scheduled for 23 November, with bombardments and activity elsewhere along the river to mislead the Romanians, and fortune favoured Mackensen. There was dense fog along the Danube, and Kosch attempted to delay the crossing until the fog cleared so that his artillery could support the first wave. The change of timing came too late, but the men of 217th Infantry Division and Goltz's improvised division crossed at two separate points in a fleet of pontoons, ferries and other vessels and encountered no resistance. Although the Romanians had detected the build-up of forces on the south bank, there were no troops deployed along the bank, and the few patrols in the area fled as soon as they encountered Kosch's men. Immediately, larger steamers that had been held back were ordered to assist the crossing, and began to move troops over in larger numbers. A few Romanian guns attempted to interdict the crossings; they missed their targets in the fog, and were rapidly silenced by the guns of the *k.u.k.* Danube Flotilla's monitors. By midday, the town of Zimnicea was in German hands, again with almost no resistance on the part of the Romanians, and during the afternoon the Bulgarian 1st Infantry Division was ferried across, hindered more by the reluctance of the Bulgarians to trust the boats than to anything else. By the end of the day, some seventeen infantry battalions were in position on the north bank. Bridge construction began late on 23 November, and was completed the following day, allowing the artillery and supply columns to cross.

In addition to the completion of the bridge, 24 November saw the first serious Romanian attack against the bridgehead; it was beaten off with ease, the guns of Kosch's artillery and the Danube Flotilla rapidly dispersing the attacking infantry. The following day, a German cavalry group supported by the leading elements of 217th Infantry Division reached and secured Alexandria, about 24 miles (40km) to the north. It was only now that the Romanians realised the magnitude of the threat that had developed in the south, but they lacked the ability or resources to respond quickly. *OHL* subordinated Falkenhayn's Ninth Army to Mackensen's overall command in order to unify the control of the forces of the Central Powers between the Danube and the Carpathians, and Goltz's cavalry linked up with Schmettow's leading elements on 27 November. It was now possible for Mackensen's Danube Army and Falkenhayn's Ninth Army to advance on converging axes towards the goal that would surely end the campaign: the capture of Bucharest.

CHAPTER 13

BUCHAREST AND BEYOND

For the Central Powers, the first priorities at the commencement of hostilities with Romania were to prevent a major incursion by the Romanians into Transylvania, and in order to ensure Bulgarian cooperation, an offensive into Dobruja. Both of these had been achieved relatively quickly, but breaking out of the Carpathians had proved to be difficult. Now, with Falkenhayn's Ninth Army free to manoeuvre at the western end of the Transylvanian front and Mackensen's Danube Army linking up from the south, attention turned to finishing the war as quickly as possible. Inevitably, there were differences of opinion on how this was to be achieved.

Although his troops had faced determined resistance in the Carpathian passes, Falkenhayn concluded from the rapid collapse of the Romanian forces in the west that the enemy was approaching the end of his strength and would not be able to offer prolonged resistance. Accordingly, he favoured a swift advance towards the east. The forces of the Danube Army could take Bucharest; he would direct the eastern part of Ninth Army to thrust towards the oilfields around Ploieşti, in order to reach the line of the River Siret as soon as possible – this would ensure that any defensive line that the Russians established in eastern Romania was as far to the east as possible, and that the valuable oilfields would be securely in the hands of the Central Powers. Hans von Seeckt, chief of staff at the headquarters of Archduke Karl, had been sent to Romania by Ludendorff to cast an eye over affairs, and was less convinced that the Romanians would be easily overrun. Whilst he could see the benefit of pressing on to the northeast as fast as possible, he wished to divert a substantial part of Kühne's command to strike towards the southeast in order to outflank any attempt by the Romanians to mount a determined defence west of Bucharest.

When *OHL* put its weight behind Seeckt's proposals, Falkenhayn inevitably objected. He remained convinced that the greatest benefit lay in a rapid advance to the east, and any diversion of forces from this thrust would slow the advance. Accordingly, he issued instructions to his formations to proceed according to his plans. His headquarters was located in Hermannstadt, and until now he had delayed moving south of the Carpathians because he felt that communications across the mountains were still unreliable, and if his headquarters was south of the passes it would be harder for him to contact higher commands or even other parts of his army. The converse was also true – it would be harder for higher commands to contact him south of the mountains than if he stayed in Hermannstadt. This is perhaps why, despite the disadvantages that he listed about moving south too soon with his headquarters, he now left them and travelled to visit Kühne, not returning to Hermannstadt until 26 November.

On his return, Falkenhayn cannot have been surprised to find several telegrams awaiting him, including one from Ludendorff questioning the orders that he had sent, in direct contradiction to the wishes of *OHL* and Seeckt to divide his troops between a drive to the northeast and the southeast. There was then a flurry of exchanges that increasingly concentrated on which troops were to be used to force the line of the Olt valley. *OHL* wished to advance on a broad front, whereas Falkenhayn insisted on concentrating against narrower objectives, largely because the terrain was too swampy, and the road network too poor, to allow for a broad front advance. Throughout the exchange of telegrams, Falkenhayn doggedly refused to alter his plans, insisting that he was better informed of the realities on the ground than staff officers in distant Pless, and that detailed suggestions on how he should proceed were both wrong and unnecessary. In this respect, Falkenhayn was merely reiterating the doctrinal arguments that had raged in German military circles in the last half-century. Moltke the Elder had been the first to articulate the near-impossibility of higher commands micro-managing front line units, and the importance of delegating decision-making to competent local commanders, and to a very large extent this had become official German policy. Falkenhayn himself had generally taken such an attitude when he was chief of the general staff, assigning broad operational objectives and leaving army commanders to implement them. Although Falkenhayn prevailed over the issue of the approach to the Olt, there were further angry exchanges as *OHL* continued to send instructions about redeployment of other elements of Ninth Army. In every case, the only achievement of the exchanges was growing anger both in Pless and Hermannstadt; Falkenhayn continued to adhere to his plans.[448]

The Romanians had started the war with high expectations of rapid success. Building on their experiences in the Second Balkan War, they had anticipated a swift advance across Transylvania, while Russian aid helped prevent any Bulgarian offensive in Dobruja. Just as the Germans had achieved their objectives, the Romanians had failed in all of theirs. Moreover, with the tide turning rapidly against them, they desperately needed a new strategy. When Falkenhayn succeeded in breaking out of the mountains, there was a proposal to try to halt the Germans along the line of the Olt valley, the only significant geographical obstacle west of Bucharest, and General Prezan was summoned from the Romanian North Army to take command of the forces being concentrated for the task. However, even before such an operation could be planned, let alone executed, Schmettow reached and captured Stoeneşti and more importantly its bridge over the Olt. Within a day, an entire German cavalry division, followed closely by 109th Infantry Division, filed over the bridge and began to secure the east bank. In any event, the establishment of Mackensen's bridgehead over the Danube – to the east of the Olt – eliminated its value as a defensive line.

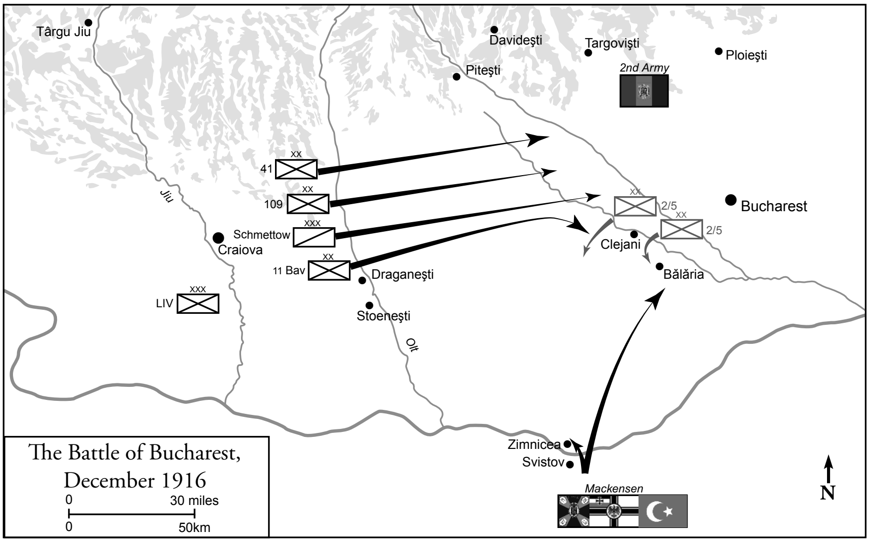
Although Falkenhayn had repeatedly commented that the haul of prisoners from his battles was disappointingly low, the fighting in the Carpathians had done considerable damage to the Romanian Army, and it was inconceivable that a new line across open ground could be established, particularly as the Russians continued to show no inclination to send troops to help. Any defence would have to be a mobile one, relying on wearing down the Germans until winter weather brought all operations to a halt. Prezan and Antonescu, his chief of staff, visited *MCG* in late November to suggest a possible solution. Although the German Ninth and Danube Armies had established contact with each other, this was largely through cavalry, and it might therefore be possible to insert a force between them. To that end, they suggested that the troops being gathered for the originally proposed defence of the Olt line should be used aggressively. They would advance against the German cavalry, and then turn south to defeat Mackensen before turning north to deal with Falkenhayn.

Such a manoeuvre was not new; Napoleon had used a similar approach on many occasions when confronted with superior forces, seeking to defeat them in detail, and the German defence of East Prussia in 1914 had been an object lesson in such an operation – indeed, the Germans had actively planned for such a defence for over a decade. However, the execution of this sort of plan required certain factors. The attacking force had to be strong enough, first to insert itself between the enemy forces, and then to defeat them in turn. Command and coordination had to be of the highest possible level, and the supply system would have to function efficiently to ensure that the strike force did not suffer a weakening of its offensive power due to ammunition shortages. Road and rail communications would have to be good enough to move both the troops and their supplies. Finally, it was vital that the enemy did not become aware of the nature of the operation and did not make any attempt to coordinate their forces – the strike force would intentionally be operating between superior enemy forces, and if they were able to respond quickly it could find itself encircled and crushed.

Given the performance of the Romanian Army to date, such an operation was wildly optimistic and clearly far beyond the capabilities of the poorly trained and inadequately equipped troops available. Nor was the Romanian officer corps of a sufficient calibre. Ion Duca, a member of the Romanian cabinet, doubted that there was any prospect of success but chose to keep silent; Averescu was not even consulted about the plan, but concluded that the battle was lost before it even commenced.[449] However, the head of the French mission, Berthelot – who in his previous role as Joffre's chief of staff during the Battle of the Marne had participated in just such an operation – ruled in favour of the plan, and such was his status that this was sufficient to ensure that an attempt would be made.[450]

In fairness, it should be pointed out that there was almost no alternative. Simply trying to stop the Germans by defensive fighting was impossible, as there was insufficient time to construct defensive positions and too few troops and guns to hold the long line that would result. The only other option was to abandon Bucharest and retreat to the east, but politically this was unthinkable. There would have to be at least an attempt to defend the Romanian capital, and whilst this high-risk plan might have had only a diminishingly small chance of success, a passive defence was doomed to failure.

The forces that were assembled for the ambitious manoeuvre did not inspire a great deal of confidence. Two of the three infantry divisions consisted of amalgams of previously shattered divisions, and the third had been brought back to strength by the absorption of poorly trained fresh drafts. In addition, the Romanian 2nd Cavalry Division was poorly equipped and unlikely to achieve much in the face of more than token resistance. Even these forces would have to be gathered together, necessitating exhausting marches along inadequate roads. When the operation finally began on 1 December, only the two amalgamated formations – 2nd/5th and 9th/19th Infantry Divisions – were available. Their start was delayed further by confusion over orders. It transpired that Prezan was using a different cipher from the divisions, and the attack did not commence until late afternoon. The early development of the operation was encouraging; the Romanian infantry rapidly pushed aside the German cavalry screen and


Târgu Jiu
Davideşti
Targovişti
Ploieşti
Piteşti
2nd Army
XX
41
XX
109
XXX
Schmettow
XX
11 Bav
Jiu
Craiova
XXX
LIV
Draganeşti
Stoeneşti
Olt
XX
2/5
XX
2/5
Bucharest
Clejani
Bălăria
Zimnicea
Svistov
Mackensen
N
0
30 miles
0
50km

The Battle of Bucharest, December 1916

attacked the left flank of 217th Infantry Division. Fighting continued throughout the night and following morning in and around Bălăria, resulting in heavy losses for the German division, which had started the battle below full strength. By 2 December, its three regiments had each been reduced to no more than the strength of a single battalion, and faced by increasing pressure the division pulled back towards the southeast, under attack from the east, north and northwest.

Mackensen had been aware that the initial minimal resistance in front of his army was strengthening daily, and had already requested that 11th Bavarian Infantry Division – one of the formations about which Falkenhayn and Ludendorff were arguing – should be deployed on the southern flank of Ninth Army to ensure good contact with the Danube Army. *OHL* had already disputed the use of this division at great length with Falkenhayn, and preferred it to be used in a broad advance against the Olt, contrary to Falkenhayn's wishes. Much like Falkenhayn, Mackensen found himself bridling at what he regarded as unnecessary attempts by *OHL* to influence the movements of individual formations, and sent a telegram to Hindenburg asking whether the chief of the general staff continued to have confidence in him. Hindenburg's response was immediate: he assured Mackensen that his confidence remained undiminished, but that it was the duty of *OHL* to suggest other possibilities.

In any event, Falkenhayn had agreed to move the Bavarians to the south, not least because the expected Romanian resistance to his advance across the Olt had not materialised. Nevertheless, the division was still marching south and was unable to intervene immediately to help the hard-pressed 217th Infantry Division. Further telegrams were passed between Mackensen and Falkenhayn as the two men considered how best to deal with the Romanian attack. Falkenhayn wished to ignore it and press on to the east, suggesting that by doing so he would make the Romanian attack irrelevant, but Mackensen was deeply worried that if 217th Infantry Division collapsed, the way would be open for the Romanians to thrust towards his bridges and thus isolate all of the Danube Army on the north bank. He already had doubts about the reliability and resilience of his Bulgarian and Turkish forces, and feared that they would rapidly disintegrate or surrender, leaving his small German force isolated.

Just as the Romanian operation began, there was an unexpected setback of disastrous proportions, as Falkenhayn reported:

> At 5 p.m. [on 1 December] General Krafft von Dellmensingen produced an order that was undoubtedly genuine from the Romanian First Army that two Romanian staff officers had been carrying with them when by mistake they drove behind our lines and were taken prisoner. It read:
>
> 'When the assault group has finally assembled today on 30 November, the attack in the general direction of Draganeşti against the enemy forces that have penetrated inland over the Danube is to commence.
>
> 'First Army is tasked to fight in its positions and hold them come what may, in order to tie down the enemy forces located to its front. It is of the greatest importance that First Army's operations are as aggressive as possible, so that by energetic measures the enemy is forced to keep all of his forces in its sector. Particular attention is to be paid to assembling reserve formations behind the left flank. The army reserve, which is located in Gliganu, is available for the exclusive use of First Army.
>
> 'The future of our people hangs on the operation begun today. I ask all officers and troops to hold their posts to the last. I remind everyone that there will be no tolerance of cowardice. Save our beloved land from the hordes of the grim barbarians. Officers and men of First Army, God will reward you. Forward with God for our nation and king.'[451]

One of the prerequisites of success for the Romanians was that the Germans did not become aware of the Romanian plans; the capture of this order effectively destroyed that possibility. Falkenhayn now knew for certain that the Romanian First Army – against which his troops were fighting – was ordered to tie down his units while the Second Army attacked Mackensen. He rapidly concluded that the Romanian venture was doomed to failure, as almost all of Kühne's command was marching directly into the area between the Romanian First Army in the north and the group of divisions attacking the Danube Army. Guessing that the Romanians were oblivious of Kühne's group, Falkenhayn wished Kühne to press on to the east, thus threatening the Romanian First Army with encirclement from the south if it attempted to hold its positions. In such circumstances, any success achieved by the Romanians against the Danube Army would be irrelevant. However, Mackensen remained concerned about the threat to his left flank. The Turkish 26th Infantry Division had been deployed to the west of 217th Infantry Division, but its reliability in such a critical moment was open to question. Accordingly, he insisted that 11th Bavarian Infantry Division should march directly against the rear of the Romanian assault group.

As the fighting on the left flank of the Danube Army continued through 2 December, there were worrying developments on the right flank, to the east. Here, the line was held by the Bulgarian component of the army, and there were reports that Russian troops were attacking alongside the Romanians. For Mackensen, this was potentially very bad news, as it suggested that the Russians had overcome their reluctance to commit their forces so far to the west in Romania. At the same time, 217th Infantry Division was steadily being ground down, but just as its final collapse and destruction appeared inevitable, 11th Bavarian Infantry Division intervened from the northwest. Attacking in two columns, Kneussl's division took the Romanians completely by surprise, swiftly overrunning the hasty defences that were thrown in its path. At the same time, the Turkish 26th Infantry Division attacked alongside Goltz's cavalry. The cavalry component of the Romanian assault group, together with one of its depleted infantry divisions, was meant to be defending against a possible German intervention from the northwest, but failed to deploy – it seems that the forced march of 11th Bavarian Infantry Division was completely undetected. By the end of the day, the Romanian 2nd/5th Infantry Division had been completely routed.

The initial success of the Romanians against 217th Infantry Division had resulted in soaring morale and hopes, and the collapse of 2nd/5th Infantry Division correspondingly led to crushing disappointment. The neighbouring 9th/19th Infantry Division now came under heavy pressure and was also driven back in disarray; desperately, the Romanians attempted to disengage from their pursuers to take a moment to regroup, but their attempts were in vain. Almost immediately, the retreat ran into the River Neajlov, with the pursuing Germans close enough to bring the main bridge near Clejani under fire. The bridge was rapidly reduced to a choked tangle of wrecked vehicles and dead horses, and the desperate Romanian infantry attempted to wade across to the east, many perishing in the attempt. The retreat did not stop until it reached Bragadiru, just a short distance to the southwest of Bucharest. The two Romanian divisions had lost almost all their artillery and over half their personnel, and had been reduced to a chaotic shambles.

With the collapse of the Romanian assault group, any hope of defending Bucharest vanished. Despite the urging – and wishful thinking – of the other Entente Powers, particularly Romania and France, the Russians remained unwilling to commit sufficient troops to make any defence of Romania sustainable. In order to create a sufficiently strong force for its attack, *MCG* had left much of the front denuded, and Schmettow led the way towards the east, parallel with the Carpathians. Rather than allow its western flank to be enveloped, the Romanian First Army retreated towards the east, and the defences that had blocked Ninth Army's attempts to force a passage of the Carpathians were abandoned one by one. Despite repeated attacks, the Germans had failed to break through the Romanian lines at Câmpulung, but the advance of German troops from the west allowed Morgen's troops – led by 12th Bavarian Infantry Division – to occupy the town on 29 November. To the south of Câmpulung, the Bavarians were dismayed to find a further line of hills that had to be forced, and even then there seemed no prospect of a swift, easy advance for the troops who had battered in vain against the Romanian defences:

> Even the terrain of Wallachia, which we now entered, was not our friend. Its surface is a thick layer of loam with a layer of sand and gravel below, which rests on several types of clay. It is a very fruitful land, a genuine Garden of Eden, and we rejoiced at the thought of the rich Romanian fields yielding wheat for Germany. But now as we marched, this Romanian earth was far too clingy; drenched by constant rain, stamped down by two armies, torn up by thousands of horses and columns of soldiers, it was transformed into a thick grey-black mass of mud. The dirt on our boots and clothes, on men and horses, wheels and wagons, was inches deep. A couple of times I saw the mountain roads coming down from the heights transformed into rivers of mud. Wagons and guns sank up to their axles. But nothing could halt us, neither the Romanian land or people, nor Romanian mountains nor mud. 'Teams over here!' Two, three, four or five pairs of horses, both our own and those captured, were hitched up, and we went on. Ammunition columns, baggage and field hospitals, everything had to follow so that the combatants up front were not left in need.[452]

Despite the deteriorating weather, the poor roads, and – intermittently – determined resistance by the Romanians, the German advance continued. The closeness of the pursuit gave the Romanians no respite, and exhausted men surrendered in growing numbers; Morgen's corps took 3,000 prisoners on 30 November and reached Târgovişte three days later:

> Here, the enemy mounted a determined defence and could only be driven out at bayonet point. The bicycle company shot an attacking Romanian cavalry regiment to pieces. Târgovişte was taken by storm at 2.30 p.m. Having taken the icebound Mount Laota on 30 November, 8th Mountain Brigade reached Pietroșița on this day and thus drew level with the right flank of the corps.[453]

After its remarkable achievements in Falkenhayn's first battle in the Carpathians, the *Alpenkorps* had continued to endure the rigours of mountain fighting, and there was no respite once the Wallachian plain was reached:

> Despite snow and frost, which greatly hindered the advance, despite the bad weather, which from time to time disrupted all telephonic communication, *Gruppe Krafft* continued to advance triumphantly …
>
> *Gruppe Krafft* pursued the steadily retreating enemy through the area immediately south of Piteşti and the Argesul region of Piteşti-Davideşti. The local magistrate handed over the city of Piteşti on the morning of 29 November. Valuable quantities of petroleum and oil as well as 180 railway wagons were captured here. This town had no noteworthy sights. The population stared at the columns of troops who marched through with a mixture of anxiety and curiosity, and gazed upon the long rows of their compatriots who had been taken prisoner, who were led through the town, with silent horror.
>
> … During the evening of 30 November the *Alpenkorps* was given a period of rest in the woodland near Davideşti – as it later transpired, in the middle of several Romanian regiments. At dawn the utterly surprised enemy was attacked and scattered. They left over 800 prisoners, fourteen guns and 100 ammunition wagons, including about thirty loaded with 210mm shells, and horses and oxen, in the hands of the attacking troops.[454]

Although some of the officers of the French military mission demanded that the Romanians make a stand to the west of Bucharest and Ploieşti, *MCG* rightly pointed out that the only purpose that this would serve was the complete destruction of the remaining Romanian forces. Berthelot had been keen to try to stop the Germans as far to the north and west as possible and to use the winter to rebuild the Romanian Army, but with Falkenhayn advancing relentlessly from the Carpathians and the Danube Army threatening Bucharest from the southwest, he now sided with *MCG*. On 5 December, after further discussions that included the Romanian king, orders were given for a retreat to the east; the Russians had agreed to build a fortified line running from Râmnicu Sărat – near to the point where the Carpathian Mountains reached their closest point to the Black Sea – to the southeast. This explicitly accepted the abandonment of Bucharest.

Earlier the same morning, Mackensen had sent a staff officer, Hauptmann Lange, into the city under a flag of truce to demand the surrender of the city; the Germans were aware that substantial amounts of money had been spent to build defensive fortifications around the Romanian capital, and whilst such fortifications had proved to be of limited value so far in the war, they might cost precious time and casualties before they were overcome. The following morning, Lange returned and reported that he had asked to meet the commander of the fortress of Bucharest, and had been startled to discover that nobody had been appointed to that role. Mackensen later described what followed:

> This suggested an evacuation, but did not ease the situation. I would have to see for myself.
>
> I joined the vanguard. They had already proved themselves as skilled in warfare in Galicia and Serbia, and as part of General von Kneussl's renowned 11th Bavarian Infantry Division at Przemyśl. Leading the way and assigned to them was the 'German Order' 152nd Infantry Regiment, equally highly regarded by me. The regiment was in the process of sending patrols forward into the line of fortifications. There was no firing, either from the forts and linking positions, which were screened by woodland and of which only a few higher structures were visible, or from the strips of woodland that followed the ring road and railway line and hid the hinterland from sight.
>
> Would Bucharest really be handed to us without further bloodshed? It seemed more likely to me by the moment.
>
> We followed the patrols from the houses of the village of Bragadiru, barely 2km [just over a mile] from the line of forts. The patrols disappeared into the woodland of the fortified ring. We set out to follow them. Then there appeared a 'German Order' rifleman, waving his cap next to the bare flagpole of the fort to the left of the road. 'Forward, driver!' we called and driving as fast as possible we – General Tappen, Major Krahmer and Lieutenant Sladek representing the Romanians – reached the ring road. We turned left along this past the fort.

> No sign of weapons or defences! The turrets had no guns! There was no sign of the enemy towards Bucharest … a message arrived that the cavalry on the right flank of Ninth Army had encountered only rearguards in the forts on the northern side of Bucharest, and the forts themselves had been found abandoned.[455]

Mackensen decided to proceed directly into the city, accompanied by a squadron of Bavarian lancers. Romanians travelling in the opposite direction informed them that defending troops had withdrawn two hours before the first Germans appeared. They travelled through the suburbs without incident and soon reached the central part of the city. Here, they encountered a solitary Romanian cavalryman, who informed them that he had been tasked to lead the incoming German soldiers to the city hall. The 'peculiar' journey, as Mackensen characterised it, continued. For men who had been at war since August 1914, it was an odd experience to see cafes and shops full of both customers and produce. To Mackensen's relief and satisfaction, the civil authorities maintained order in an exemplary manner:

> It couldn't have been organised better in Berlin. There were a few 'Hurrahs' and greetings in German. But were we not in the midst of the population of an enemy capital city? Was this not wartime? Were we in a dream? Hadn't we been involved in heavy fighting just a few hours ago? Instead of enemy bullets, we were hit by – a flower? We passed the Palace of Justice and went over the Dâmbovița … after passing through a narrowing of the road, we were suddenly in front of the royal castle.[456]

A large crowd had gathered here to watch the momentous surrender. Mackensen and his entourage entered the castle and were met by two senior officials who invited them to join them for breakfast. To Mackensen's surprise, they were joined by another group of Germans, a patrol from Ninth Army who had reached Bucharest from the northwest. This patrol had been handed a document from the City Mayor:

> Bucharest, the capital city of the Kingdom of Romania, has been completely evacuated of troops and will be handed over to you without resistance.
>
> The undersigned Mayor Emil Petrescu asks Your Excellency, in the name of the peaceful inhabitants of the capital city, to take all necessary measures to ensure normal life, both in the interests of the occupation troops as well as for the protection of the peaceful inhabitants.[457]

When they returned to the courtyard, the Germans were greeted by loud cheers from the city's German and Austrian inhabitants, many of whom had been interned until the arrival of the German troops. The contrast with the German entry into Belgrade the previous autumn, in the midst of heavy fighting against the Serbian Army, could not have been greater.

Mackensen's account makes no mention of the fact that in addition to the message handed over to the patrol from Ninth Army, a delegation made up of civilians from neutral countries had met some of his troops the previous evening and had assured them that the city would not be defended. Nevertheless, it was a fine way for him to celebrate his 67th birthday; as a man who was widely known as 'the old hussar', he particularly enjoyed the thought that true to the traditions of the light cavalry in whose ranks he had served as a young man, he had intrepidly led the way into the Romanian capital.

In keeping with the orderly handover by the Romanians, the Germans took strenuous measures to ensure that there was no disorder. In late November, Krafft had issued an order to his men that was typical of other units:

> Wherever you stay, maintain your quarters in proper condition and leave them in the same state that you would wish to find them.[458]

Although many German soldiers, both as individuals and as units, seized footwear to replace their worn-out boots, there was little or no other looting. Aware that he had less control of the troops of other nations than he had of German troops, Mackensen allowed only token elements of the Bulgarian and Turkish formations in his army to enter Bucharest. Whilst the city's population was relatively relaxed about the presence of German soldiers, there was far greater resentment when it came to Turks and Bulgarians. The former were still disliked as representatives of the Ottoman Empire, which had ruled this region for so long; the latter had been Romania's opponents in the Second Balkan War, and had already acquired an unsavoury reputation for looting. Although their depredations in Bucharest were limited by Mackensen's measures, there was widespread pillaging and wanton destruction in the surrounding countryside. The Germans were forced to task a cavalry regiment to try to restore order, and the Austro-Hungarian warships of the Danube Flotilla repeatedly intercepted livestock and other items that were being shipped across the river by the Bulgarians. The exasperation of the Germans with their Bulgarian allies had been growing since before the outset of the invasion of Romania – the Bulgarians had seemed reluctant to declare war on Romania, and there was constant friction during the Dobruja campaign – and the misconduct of Bulgarian troops north of the Danube left Oberst Richard Hentsch, Mackensen's quartermaster, wishing that the Bulgarian 1st Infantry

Division had been left in Dobruja and a second Turkish division had joined the Danube Army.[459]

Falkenhayn had been anxious to secure the Romanian oilfields to the north of Bucharest, and had directed both the *Alpenkorps* and 12th Bavarian Infantry Division to Ploieşti. As they advanced, the German troops came across repeated signs of the growing disintegration of the Romanian Army:

> From Baleni, a large, spread-out village on the road to Ploieşti, there were ever more grim signs of fighting that had taken place here. Dead horses, shattered wagons were scattered through the woodland, and at the roadside were half-buried dead Romanians. The beginnings of collapse could be seen amongst the groups of prisoners, who were often made up of members of thirty or more different regiments. Huge clouds of smoke appeared on the horizon as we approached the Prahova valley.[460]

The smoke was the result of the activity of a British officer, Major John Griffiths. Known as 'Empire Jack' on account of his enthusiasm for British imperialism, he had served in the Boer War, and in 1914 he had helped raise a squadron of volunteer cavalry when war broke out. He was instrumental in recruiting British miners into the ranks of the tunnelling companies of the Royal Engineers, and was dispatched to Romania to prevent as much of the country's oil infrastructure as possible from falling intact into German hands. He arrived in Bucharest in mid-November and was given little cooperation by the Romanians, who were understandably reluctant to destroy their own industrial achievements. Accompanied by a team of Britons, many of whom he recruited locally, as well as like-minded Romanians, Griffiths travelled swiftly through the oil region, destroying everything he could. Wherever locals attempted to resist, he resorted to force. Some installations were blown up, concrete was poured into oil wells, and rail lines were wrecked. Often, German forces overtook his team and he found himself effectively operating behind German lines; despite this, his wrecking work continued, denying the Germans access to many of the precious oilfields and destroying large stocks of fuel as well as grain.

Griffiths changed his name by deed poll in 1917 to Norton-Griffiths, and was found dead in September 1930 after he went for a swim in Alexandria in Egypt. His body was found with a single bullet wound in his temple. At the time, he was experiencing financial difficulties, but there were suggestions that Romanians who were seeking revenge for the damage that he had inflicted in 1916 were responsible.[461]

The *Alpenkorps* reached Ploieşti on the same day that Mackensen took possession of Bucharest. Close by, 12th Bavarian Infantry Division had been making good progress; part of the division was in the town of Matau, where despite fog reducing visibility, the advance continued:

> They saw a marching column indistinctly some 700m to their left on a road. The leader of the lancer troop … leapt forward and at close range could see that it was a Romanian battalion. A German-speaking officer came up to him: 'You must surrender, behind me stands an entire division.' He then took the officer's pistol and ordered the men to lay down their weapons, seized another three artillery officers who were close behind and then handed over the entire column (ten officers and 405 men) to his lancer troops. He rode on and captured a Romanian battery with 100 personnel.[462]

The controlled, step-by-step retreat that *MCG* had envisaged was steadily turning into a complete rout. Prisoners were taken at an increasing rate, though many Romanian soldiers merely deserted their units and tried to make their way home. In the first week of December, Falkenhayn's Ninth Army took about 6,000 prisoners.[463] Attempts to halt the Germans along the line of the Cricov valley, to the east of Ploieşti, were futile. By the time that they reached the intended line where the Russians had prepared positions, only Averescu's Second Army was in any state to remain in combat; all other troops were withdrawn to the rear for desperately needed reorganisation.

The front line in eastern Romania would have to be held by the Russians, who had realised as early as mid-October that the resources they had allocated to support the newest member of the Entente were inadequate. Winogradsky was summoned to a meeting at *Stavka* on 21 October:

> I was told that Grand Duke Sergei Mikhailovich [inspector-general of artillery since January 1916] wished to see me. He received me with his usual courtesy and explained in a few words why I had been summoned. *Stavka* was sending a mission made up of artillery officers to Romania, under the title of 'technical advisors', and he wished to lead them to establish close links with the Romanian artillery with a view to achieving united action in the future, and to give them the benefit of our experiences in more than two years of war. The setbacks of the Romanian Army in September showed that their preparations were not on the same level as those of the enemy and in general, the army had not benefited from the experience of these past years. In particular, the artillery knew well the

> simple techniques of firing, but lacked communications, and was not adequately prepared for employment in tactical firing.
>
> … During my time at *Stavka* … the high command was very troubled about the situation in Romania, which was beginning to go bad. The setbacks in Dobruja followed, and the Russo-Romanian troops, driven back to the frontier, fell back without pause and were even about to reach the Constanța–Chernovody line. These two locations were of enormous importance. The first was the only Romanian port on the Black Sea that was a major outlet for petroleum; the second, at the head of the railway bridge over the Danube, the only permanent crossing over the river. Its loss blocked any future offensive in Dobruja.[464]

In addition to the token forces sent with Zayontchovsky, Alexeyev had dispatched IV Siberian Corps, which arrived too late to prevent Mackensen's forces triumphing in Dobruja. Ever since the beginning of Brusilov's offensive, there had been a steady flow of units from the other fronts to Southwest Front, and this withdrawal of units continued into the autumn, but increasingly so that troops could be sent to Romania. This had already led to all Russian offensives in the northern and central sectors of the Eastern Front being scaled down or abandoned, but with the diversion of resources to Romania, Brusilov had no choice but to diminish and eventually abandon his own offensive. The bloodletting of the futile attacks near Kovel had eviscerated the divisions that had started the offensive at Lutsk with such promise. Without fresh troops from elsewhere, it was impossible to sustain assaults on the German and Austro-Hungarian lines. In the words of Alfred Knox, 'the initiative had passed to the enemy, and the high hopes of the summer were gone.'[465]

In order to deal with the need to extend Russian lines further south, the headquarters of the Russian Eighth Army was moved south to Czernowitz, where it took command of formations as they arrived from elsewhere; its former divisions were assigned to Gurko's Special Army, which now grew to a total of twenty-five infantry divisions and five cavalry divisions. In a final attempt to salvage some of the 'high hopes' that had effectively been abandoned, he threw fifteen divisions into an attempt to penetrate to Władimir Wołynsk on 16 October. As had been the case with all the attempts of late summer, this attack foundered in the face of heavy defensive fire. Knox later recorded his observations of the repeated assaults:

> The failure of Kaledin's and Gurko's offensive to the west of Lutsk was as complete as that of Bezobrazov on the Stochod. In almost every attack the Russian infantry reached the enemy's second and third line of trench, but was shelled out and lost

> heavily in retiring through the barrage. General Khanjin, who as Inspector of Artillery of the Eighth Army was responsible for the first attacks, maintained that the Russian guns did all that could be expected of them. They cut the enemy's wire and made his trenches untenable. They could not fight his batteries because they had no aeroplanes to tell them where they were. He said the attacks had come to nothing because the troops were worn out and had lost most of their good officers. General Smislovsky, who as Inspector of Artillery in the Special Army directed the guns in the later attacks, said that the first attempts failed because no batteries were detailed to combat the enemy's batteries, and the later attacks collapsed because the infantry had lost heart.[466]

Zayontchovsky had achieved almost nothing in Romania, not least because he and Alexeyev had agreed that they would do as little as possible. But despite his personal views regarding Romania, Alexeyev had little hesitation in sacking Zayontchovsky from his post and replacing him with Sakharov, who took command of what was now known as the Army of the Danube. For the moment, it was all that the Entente Powers could do to move sufficient troops south to establish a continuous line; railway lines through Moldavia into Romania were poor and of limited capacity. When Winogradsky travelled to Romania with the rest of the group of 'military advisors' sent to help the Romanians, it took three days to travel from *Stavka* in Mogilev to Bucharest. Here, the Russians set to work through the first weeks of November, gathering information and assessing the scale of the task they faced. Winogradsky recorded their conclusions:

> The Romanian soldier is excellent: brave, disciplined, resourceful, capable of enduring hardships, and of attacking energetically if well led. But his training and fieldcraft leave much to be desired. Some officers were too self-satisfied and thought too much of themselves, a flaw that disappeared after the first setbacks. The better officers had received solid training in France and Germany and by spending time in the enemy armies; but most had not cared enough about their military training and started with incomplete knowledge. Naturally, I learned the most about the artillery: it contained many elite officers who had been well instructed with good technical preparation and knew well how to fire. In general, the Romanians are very capable, grasp things very quickly and think logically, which facilitated rapport with them. If one adds in their great politeness and spirit of hospitality, one can see that there would be no problem in establishing mutual understanding. Unfortunately, these qualities were diluted by a lack of tenacity, perseverance and foresight.

> … One had the impression that instruction in the artillery stopped when they left gunnery school and there was no further training. In most cases, batteries could fire well but had not received sufficient tactical training and did not cooperate, hence the poor performance in the opening months of the campaign. The lack of preparation for cooperative fire can be demonstrated by the lack of the means of communications: the batteries deployed with only 2km [just over a mile] of cable, and were thus not able to work efficiently and could not liaise with the infantry.
>
> Consequently, unable to make use of either favourable terrain or cover, the batteries were obliged to deploy in known emplacements or to replace their telephones with runners. The artillery also lacked good binoculars and compasses, its gun direction was the most primitive of systems: one had to watch how the better units risked destruction without any gain due to a lack of elementary methodology. It seemed that all the experiences of the war in Manchuria were unknown to the Romanians, who were sometimes astonished to learn that the techniques that we suggested to them had been accepted practice amongst us for long before the war, indeed from shortly after the 1904–1905 campaigns.
>
> … The infantry was too skittish, and inferior to that of the enemy in its training; it was almost completely lacking in machine-guns, grenades, wire-cutters and mobile kitchens; pinned down by the enemy's heavy artillery and too poorly supported by its own artillery, it was exhausted by constant service without rest and was unable to avoid a slump in morale after the beginning of the campaign.
>
> When hostilities commenced, the command personnel were a mixed group: amongst the senior commanders there were a few distinguished generals with solid training who knew their task and were full of energy, but were forced to work in an unfavourable situation.[467]

The scale of support that Romania needed increased steadily, and even by late October was a considerable burden upon the Russians:

> The winter will be the time of special danger in Romania. If we survive until the spring, we will have had time to train and equip the Romanian Army. We have already given it 100,000 Austrian rifles, 25 million [rounds of] Austrian small arms ammunition, and a large number of Austrian machine-guns.
>
> The Romanians seem to have learnt nothing from the experience of the war, though they had officers attached to the armies of the Central Powers. They dig trenches as shallow as in 1877. They had only three telephone apparatus for seventeen batteries. The Russians have given them 150 apparatus and 1,000 versts

> of wire. They do not know how to mend the telephone wire. They are without Hughes telegraph machines. The Russian telegraphists regard them with the utmost scorn![468]

With the benefit of hindsight, senior officers were able to look back on the debacle of Romania's entry into the war as a great mistake. By the time that Brătianu was ready to enter the war, the worst of the crises in Russia and on the Somme had passed, leaving the Germans with a free hand to redeploy sufficient forces to crush the Romanian Army. Had Romania been content to push forward to a defensible line in Transylvania, it might have been possible to hold on to modest gains through the winter before resuming pressure upon the Central Powers in early 1917; instead, Russia had to divert so many troops to the south that the Russian Army was left unable to exert any serious pressure upon the German and Austro-Hungarian forces on the Eastern Front. Far from being the great asset that the Entente Powers had hoped it would be, Romania was a huge burden, requiring the diversion of substantial amounts of military *matériel* as well as troops. Just as serious was the acquisition of Romanian resources by the Central Powers; despite the best efforts of Griffiths' team, huge quantities of grain and fuel fell into the hands of the advancing Germans, doing much to reduce the pressures that had built steadily in Germany and Austria-Hungary since the start of the war. The quartermaster-general of the Russian Special Army summarised the views of many when he spoke to Knox, criticising the conduct of the war in a manner that would have been regarded as extraordinary just a year or so earlier:

> He fairly burst out regarding the stupidity of the general allied direction of the war. He said that everything was going well with us and we had had the initiative all the summer. Both sides were fairly balanced, and it seemed that the intervention of Romania would turn the scale definitely in our favour. We had so mismanaged matters that Romanian intervention became a curse rather than an advantage.
>
> Our failure now was worse than that of last year, for then we failed through lack of shell, now we failed through sheer stupidity. We should have incorporated the Romanian Army in the Russian Army, making a new front directly under *Stavka*. We should have taken the whole direction of the Romanian Army into our hands. If Romania was unwilling to come in under those conditions, we were better without her – God be with her!
>
> We should have had Russian forces ready to advance in Transylvania only sufficiently far to neutralise the Kronstadt re-entrant, then, having reached a

> shorter line of defence, we should have fortified it and have held it passively. Meanwhile, our main forces should have advanced from Dobruja and, in cooperation with Sarrail [the commander of Anglo-French forces in Macedonia] have definitely conquered Bulgaria, severing Turkey from her allies.
>
> He blamed the Russian command for having failed to recognise in August that, with our inferior technical equipment, further progress in Galicia was impossible. He blamed the Allies for Sarrail's passiveness and for having failed to insist on a proper utilisation of Romanian intervention. He would now take all the units that we could possibly spare from Southwest Front and hurl them into Romania. That we were not doing this he could only ascribe to our miserable railway system.[469]

Whilst it is highly questionable whether a Russian offensive through Dobruja, in conjunction with the western troops in Macedonia, would have been able to conquer Bulgaria in quite the straightforward manner portrayed here, there can be little doubt that there was a singular lack of cooperation between the Russians, the Romanians and Sarrail's Anglo-French forces. Despite the protracted negotiations about Romanian entry into the war, almost no thought had been given to how Romania's forces might take part in a joint strategy with the troops of the other Entente Powers.

Others lamented the failure to exploit the initial gains of the summer – as was frequently the case, attention frequently focussed on the under-performance of the cavalry. But even if Russian cavalry had been present in sufficient strength to fall upon the defeated *k.u.k.* Fourth Army after the fighting at Lutsk, Falkenhayn's experience of conducting a cavalry pursuit across Romania suggests that the results would probably have been disappointing. Men could be inspired to keep going when exhausted; horses, by contrast, required rest, re-shoeing and supplies of fodder that dwarfed the food requirements of the infantry. Despite this, many cavalry officers greeted with horror any suggestions that all Russian cavalry should be dismounted and used as infantry, as had been the case on the northern flank of the Lutsk salient. The final word on the ultimate failure of the Brusilov Offensive comes from Knox:

> The plain truth is that, without aeroplanes [for reconnaissance] and more heavy guns and shells and some knowledge of their use, it is butchery, and useless butchery, to drive Russian infantry against German lines.[470]

Southwest Front now stretched into Romania. Its most northern formation was Gurko's Special Army, with Eleventh and Seventh Armies to the south; all three faced their enemies over ground that had been heavily contested and was steeped with blood. Eighth Army had formed up around Czernowitz, with Ninth Army and the Army of the Danube deployed in Romania. As the weather deteriorated in the third winter of the war, both the Russians and their opponents had little choice but to pause, reflect on the events of the campaign season, and plan for yet another year of conflict.

CHAPTER 14

THE CRACKS IN THE EDIFICE

The war that many had confidently predicted would be over by Christmas 1914 was dragging wearily into its third winter. The year had seen tremendous battles: the Germans had attempted to bleed the French Army to death at Verdun; the Italians had attacked repeatedly on the Isonzo and then fought desperately to prevent an Austro-Hungarian breakthrough onto the Veneto plain; the British and French had launched their huge offensive in the Somme sector of the Western Front; and the Russians had attacked at many points, finding success – briefly – only in Brusilov's offensive. After waiting in the hope of entering the war at a singularly opportune moment, the Romanians had thrown themselves into a war that had rapidly consumed their inexperienced army, but despite this, and the Russian advances near Lutsk and north of the Carpathians, no side was significantly closer to victory. One German officer taken prisoner by the British told his captors that he could see no end to the war, and that it amounted to the suicide of Europe's old nations; few would have disagreed with his assessment.[471]

Both Germany and the Entente Powers had entered the year with high expectations of success. This was the year that would see the French Army brought to the point of collapse, either at Verdun or elsewhere as a result of the losses suffered at Verdun; instead, it was arguably the German Army that was more seriously damaged by Falkenhayn's battle of attrition. The French had rotated units out of the area when their losses reached 50 per cent, ensuring that there were sufficient experienced soldiers left to rebuild the formations when fresh drafts were brought in. Believing that they were winning the battle, the Germans had allowed their units to remain in the battle line until they had suffered such high losses that they had to be withdrawn – often resulting in 90 per cent casualties. The apparent higher rate of turnover of French units had further fed the German illusion that they were on the brink of success. When he summed up the experiences of Verdun, Prince Maximilian of Baden could have been describing the entire war to date:

> The campaign of 1916 ended in bitter disillusionment all round. We and our enemies had shed our best blood in streams, and neither we nor they had come one step closer to victory. The word 'deadlock' was on every lip.[472]

In particular, the losses of officers and NCOs had seriously degraded the quality of the German Army. Replacements of both categories lacked the experience and training of their predecessors, and just as importantly there was little or no opportunity for the new leaders to establish the close relationship with their men that had helped to make the German Army of 1914 such a formidable weapon. Even a year earlier, soldiers had begun to complain that the new generation of middle-class officers lacked the commitment to their troops of their predecessors, who were drawn largely from the Prussian *Junker* families, steeped in the traditional Prussian values of *Nüchternheit* – an almost untranslatable word combining sobriety, thrift and devotion to duty. By the end of 1916, complaints about the new generation of officers were growing steadily, as was more outspoken criticism of the high command.

Many, both at the time and since, blamed Falkenhayn for the failure to destroy the French Army in the fighting around Verdun. There seems little doubt that he missed several opportunities to exploit successes, but much of this blame could also be directed at the field commanders – Crown Prince Wilhelm, Schmidt von Knobelsdorf, Ewald von Lochow, Max von Gallwitz and Georg von der Marwitz. Unlike his successors at *OHL*, Falkenhayn did not try to micro-manage subordinate commands, though the restrictions he placed upon their access to reserves repeatedly limited the ability of those subordinates to exploit their gains. Given the great value that he had placed in winning the battle of attrition, Falkenhayn cannot have expected anything other than his dismissal when his plan failed to deliver the expected victory. He was perhaps fortunate to be given a field command and used the opportunity well to show his skills, arguing his case forcefully when required against Ludendorff and Hindenburg. Having pursued the Romanians across Wallachia, his Ninth Army – together with the Danube Army – fought the final battle of the year in eastern Romania on 21–27 December near Râmnicu Sărat. His forces had been greatly degraded during the campaign, particularly Schmettow's cavalry corps, but the attack on the predominantly Russian defences proved to be another success, rolling the front line perhaps 18 miles (30km) to the northeast. In January, a further attack gained ground again before winter finally brought the campaign to a close.

After the end of the campaign in Romania, Falkenhayn was moved to take command of the Turkish Yildirim Army Group (known to the Germans as *Heeresgruppe F*) in Palestine, where he served until 1918. During this period, he experienced a series of setbacks and defeats, but despite being heavily outnumbered, he succeeded in inflicting substantial losses on the British and French forces that drove the Turks from Palestine; perhaps his most important contribution to the sector was the manner in which he prevented his forces from persecuting the small Jewish population of the region. This is all the more remarkable given the widespread anti-Semitism of the era and the subsequent conduct of Germany in a later war.[473]

Mackensen, who had shown both military and diplomatic skill in welding a conglomeration of Bulgarian, German and Turkish troops into an effective army, remained in the region as military governor of Romania. Tappen, his chief of staff, was assigned to take command of a newly raised division of replacements, much to Mackensen's bitter disappointment:

> I had settled down so well with Tappen. We also got on well as individuals. The relationship we had in the few months that we worked together was ideal. Now, for the fifth time, I had to start again.[474]

The new chief of staff was Oberst Emil Hell, a veteran of the Eastern Front who had impressed his men with the manner in which he directed artillery fire onto a property owned by his own family during the Battle of Tannenberg. The two men had worked together before the war, and they rapidly established the close relationship between commander and chief of staff that was the cornerstone of the German way of war. As fighting died down in January, Mackensen reflected on what he saw, with every justification, as a job well done:

> The military communiqués about my army group in the near future will not describe any significant events. We have reached the desired line and are digging ourselves in there with all the means of modern field fortification and the latest experiences of war. Positional warfare will therefore characterise this sector too, until the high command gives me new instructions. My troops have already begun to withdraw. One Bulgarian division is leaving Dobruja for the Macedonian front. Two German cavalry divisions and at least one German infantry division will then entrain from Wallachia for other theatres of war. Our enemies seem to be preparing

> great offensives on all sides. We will defend against them as we did against all previous ones, perhaps even to pre-empt them, but in any case striving not to hand over the initiative to them. As before, the morale of the troops is excellent.[475]

Writing after the war, he added some further observations:

> Officers and troops achieved what appeared to be almost impossible. The rich resources of Wallachia – corn, wheat and cattle of all kinds, oil and, of particular importance for Bulgaria and Macedonia, salt as well as other produce with which nature had extravagantly blessed this land became available to us, and its supply to the army and homeland was secured, Transylvania was cleared of the enemy, the Danube was opened from Briala downstream, the right flank of the Eastern Front was shortened and securely anchored on the Black Sea, and Germany's reputation enhanced by new victories. An attack by our enemies that was intended to finish us off was brought to nothing. Instead of delivering a killing blow to Germany and its allies, the war had brought Romania to the brink of destruction and given the Germans the opportunity to demonstrate their victorious military expertise.[476]

In his memoirs, Ludendorff recorded that at the end of 1916 he anticipated difficult times ahead:

> *OHL* therefore had to expect that the huge enemy superiority in men and *matériel* would make itself ever more palpable during 1917 than in 1916. We had to fear that battles like the Somme would flare up at various points of our front in the near future, for which in the long term even our troops would not be able to endure. And even less so if the enemy gave us no time to recover and to replenish our war *matériel*. Our situation was immensely difficult and a way out of it could scarcely be conceived. We could not contemplate an attack of our own as we had to hold our reserves for defence. We could not hope for the collapse of any of the Entente powers. In a drawn-out war, the possibility of our defeat could not be discounted. This was because the basis for us to sustain a war of exhaustion was very unfavourable. The home front had been hit hard.[477]

The forcible acquisition of the agricultural produce of Romania came at a critical moment for the Central Powers. The weather in the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires had not been favourable for much of the year and was particularly cool and wet during the late summer and early autumn, resulting in poor grain harvests. Matters were compounded by shortages of fertiliser, with nitrate and phosphate chemicals being diverted increasingly for the production of explosives. There was a universal shortage of horses for agricultural work with so many requisitioned for the army, and of course a large proportion of rural manpower had been drafted into the army. In an attempt to alleviate the shortage of grain, the government had approved the use of potato starch in bread production, but the poor weather resulted in the spread of fungal diseases that destroyed half the potato crop. The result was what became known as the Turnip Winter, with relatively plentiful turnips being substituted for almost every occasion where potatoes might ordinarily have been used; a document entitled *Rüben Statt Kartoffeln* or 'Turnips instead of Potatoes', describing recipes that showed how turnips could be used, was published in large quantities and widely distributed, but the measure remained deeply unpopular. To make matters worse, the winter of 1916–17 was particularly cold across Central Europe. With so much coal being diverted for military and industrial use, thousands of homes were left without any heating, and winter illnesses took a far greater toll on the population than might have been the case had the people not already been so malnourished.

In an attempt to alleviate flour shortages, the German authorities had to widen the range of ingredients used as flour substitutes for bread production. With potato starch in short supply, other foodstuffs – corn, pulses, even chestnuts – were soon being added. The quality of bread fell steadily and the appearance of this everyday staple changed to an unrecognisable yellow substance that often disintegrated in the hands of those who attempted to eat it. In the early stages of the war, worried families had sent food parcels to their menfolk at the front; by mid-1916, many soldiers were sending food parcels in the opposite direction, particularly from northern France where it was still relatively easy to find supplies.

Wages throughout the Central Powers had fallen considerably, and combined both with spiralling prices and the absence of so many wage earners at the front, this left families in an almost impossible situation. Frustrated by the inadequacy and cost of official supplies, many took to travelling into the countryside in attempts to buy food directly from farmers. This practice led in some cases to catastrophic shortages in the cities – as most of this activity occurred at weekends, milk supplies to places like Stuttgart plummeted on Mondays to less than 20 per cent of the normal level. The authorities made various attempts to stop this practice, positioning police checkpoints on main roads to stop and search travellers and confiscate any food that was found, but the resourceful and hungry civilians simply found other byways. Some official interventions were more successful than others – the milk shortage in Stuttgart on Mondays was largely eliminated by an alteration in train timetables that made it impossible for people to reach the surrounding countryside after they had finished work and still return to the city the same day.[478]

Rationing was widespread across Germany and Austria-Hungary, but functioned with varying degrees of efficacy. The shortages of food began to have worrying effects on the population; by the end of 1916, 15 per cent of the new draft of recruits in one regiment lost weight when they commenced training, largely because they arrived at the depot in an undernourished state.[479] Even in Bavaria, which on account of its milder climate and large-scale agriculture suffered less than other areas, children in late 1916 were over 2cm shorter than their peers before the war. Matters were even worse in Austria, which had been greatly dependent upon Hungary for food supplies. As the war progressed, the Hungarians increasingly restricted the amount of produce that they allowed to leave the country. Also, the farms of Galicia had produced a sizable percentage of the food consumed in the Austro-Hungarian Empire before the war – over 60 per cent of Austria's barley and more than a third of its potato and wheat consumption was fed by the fertile lands along the northern edge of the Carpathians. The region was badly ravaged during the fighting of 1914 and 1915, and further harmed by widespread outbreaks of killing diseases such as cholera; food production did not recover until after the war.

Tensions within the Austro-Hungarian Empire had surfaced early in the war, and continued to develop as the conflict dragged on. In the face of constant criticism from Vienna about Hungary not contributing its fair share to the war effort, the Budapest government of István Tisza agreed to take on a greater role in supplying food to the *k.u.k.* Army, but this led to ever-greater restrictions on what food was exported to Austria. Whilst Tisza was prepared to use Hungary's agricultural production as leverage in negotiating further constitutional concessions from Vienna, he was also mindful of growing tension within Hungary itself. His government had been elected in 1910 by a very restricted voting franchise, largely centred on traditional land-owning families, and even with this restriction there were widespread allegations of electoral fraud playing a part in the election of Tisza's party. As was the case elsewhere in Europe, there was growing pressure to expand the franchise. In 1915, there had been demands that veterans returning from the front should be given the right to vote, but Tisza successfully blocked the proposal, largely through fear that this would inevitably lead to a universal franchise, which would almost certainly cost his party its pre-eminent position. However, failure to offer such concessions to the Hungarian population ensured that popular support for the war remained poor.

Initial attempts by Berlin and Vienna to intervene in the growing food shortage were generally failures, and in many cases made matters worse, as they concentrated on trying to control prices rather than making any attempt to boost production. Rationing had been implemented in Germany as early as January 1915, in Austria three months later, and finally in Hungary in January 1916. The items covered by rationing grew steadily, and the quantities allowed per person were incrementally reduced. The system was imperfect, not least because shops were frequently unable to supply the diminishing quantities of food that the ration cards authorised. Attempts to give priority to certain groups – breast-feeding women, workers in key industries – merely added to the growing sense of unfairness.

In May 1916, the *Kriegsernährungsamt*, or war food office, was created in Germany, headed by the former president of East Prussia, Adolf von Batocki. A lawyer by training, he found himself leading a team of officials carefully chosen to reflect all walks of life in Germany – representatives of the major political parties, trade unionists, and delegates selected by major cities. It was a measure of the growing pressure exerted by women, who had to do most of the queuing and searching for food, that they too were able to secure representation in the new office. Although his appointment was greeted with acclaim by the German press, the reality was that Batocki's powers were limited. He had no writ over affairs outside Prussia, and therefore the rich lands of Bavaria were outside his control; even within Prussia, disputes with officials from the ministry of agriculture and the ministry of the interior further hindered the work of his office. In an attempt both to reduce the inequalities of food supply and perhaps to boost public unity, large cities were instructed in late 1916 to establish public kitchens, but these proved to be deeply unpopular. Many resented the suggestion that they had to eat with those they regarded as their social inferiors, but at least the kitchens ensured that the poorest in society received some nutrition.

The problems in the Austrian parts of the Dual Monarchy were even greater than those in Germany, and the government response was typical: instead of attempting to create an office that had sufficient authority to cut through the obstructions decisively, the only action in Vienna was to create a new body that added to the stifling bureaucracy. As shortages and protests grew, the *Amt Für Volksernährung*, or office for the people's food, was established in December 1916. A similar body existed in Hungary, but cooperation between them, as in so many respects in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, remained poor. The potato harvest in 1916 was less than half of the peacetime tonnage, and growing shortages of meat resulted in the widespread slaughter of horses for meat – something that inevitably impacted badly upon agricultural production.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Pál Kelemen, a Hungarian cavalryman, watched a young woman in the railway station restaurant in Brod, who showed the same quiet despair that was so widespread across Europe:

> She wore a simple, frayed dress and a sort of fur wrap around her neck. I couldn't fail to notice this somewhat fragile, tired person, with her travelling bags, her shawl and handbag, the boxes on the chair and the coat hanging from a hook.
>
> For a moment she cast her apathetic glance at me, then returned with complete equanimity to her own affairs. She held a field postcard. She had held a pen in her hand for some time but hadn't written a single word. Perhaps she felt she was being watched, or her thoughts had been disturbed by the tramping of another company on its way to the front. Finally, she wrote the address in tall, strong letters. Then she lowered her head a little, bent down to the table and sat once more with empty eyes.
>
> The train with the company now began to pull away. Shouts and songs passed through the restaurant. She raised her head a little, but didn't look around. I sat with an open newspaper and from its shelter I saw she had tears in her eyes. She hesitated, then took her handkerchief and carefully dabbed at her cheeks. She took up her pen and wrote a few more words.
>
> The conductor came onto the railway platform ringing his bell and announcing in a loud voice that the train to the north would leave in a moment. The young woman paid her bill and … took up her coat and assembled her numerous possessions. Suddenly, her gaze fell on the half-written postcard on the table; she seized it and tore it up. Her gloved hands shook as she threw the shreds onto the table.[480]

There were growing signs of civilian unrest throughout both Germany and Austria-Hungary. As early as March 1916, queues outside food shops numbered several hundred hopeful civilians, particularly if produce that was difficult to obtain, such as butter, was thought to have been delivered. In April, a woman in Hamburg wrote to her son at the front that there had been a stampede at a butcher's shop, resulting in two women being killed and sixteen injured.[481] Riots followed in some cities, with seventy recorded in Bohemia alone in 1916.[482] Far more alarming for the German authorities was a mutiny in the navy when sailors protested that their rations were almost inedible, at a time when food for officers was relatively unrestricted. Deep divisions grew between those who lived in cities and those in the countryside, with the former suspecting the latter of holding back food supplies, while the latter resented the price controls that they felt prevented them from increasing production. There was also a worrying increase in strike action and crime. Serious riots occurred throughout Austria; a group of women burst into government buildings in Linz in October to protest about the failure of the state to provide food, and there were repeated episodes of unrest in Vienna, where the authorities had to use fire-hoses to disperse the protesters.[483] In Vienna, there was widespread shock when Karl von Stürgkh, the minister-president of Austria, was shot and killed. His assassin was Friedrich Adler, the son of the founder of the Austrian Social Democratic Party. When he finally came to trial in 1917 (after delays brought about by discussions on whether he was sane), Adler portrayed the killing as an act against the war and the autocratic manner in which the Austrian government had conducted its affairs, and the initial shock at the assassination was replaced by widespread sympathy for his point of view. He was found guilty and condemned to death, but this was commuted to a long prison sentence before he was first pardoned by the new emperor, Karl, and later granted an amnesty after the war.[484]

The accession of Karl to the Habsburg throne in November 1916 raised mixed feelings throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire. For some, there was a sense that the death of the venerable Franz Joseph would be followed inevitably by the dissolution of the empire over which he had presided for so long; others preferred to take a more optimistic view, hoping that the new emperor would usher in sufficient changes to save the empire while at the same time bringing it into the modern era. In December, Karl dismissed Archduke Frederick as the nominal head of the army and took up the post himself. As the year drew to a close, it was impossible to predict whether he would prove the pessimists or the optimists right. Ludendorff had his opinions about both Karl and Franz Ferdinand, who would have become emperor if he hadn't been assassinated in Sarajevo:

> The assassinated heir to the throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, did not develop into the energetic man that he was often regarded to be. His nature was actually that of someone easily swayed and indecisive and he was in no sense a friend of Germany. His Majesty our Kaiser had gone to considerable trouble to encourage him and his wife to be friendlier to Germany. His death was a tragedy, and the consequences of his murder were terrible … Nor was [he] the man to take control of the rudder of the Dual Monarchy after the death of the elderly emperor. Centrifugal forces had already grown too strong during the war. Mismanagement dominated everywhere. In many respects, the morale of the people and army was

> poor. War-weariness was growing, and the longing for peace was ever stronger. It would have taken a special person to restore the will to fight to the Dual Monarchy and to breathe new life into the *k.u.k.* Army.
>
> I met the Emperor Karl when he was an archduke for the first time in December 1914. I was left with the strong impression of youthfulness. I encountered him again at the beginning of November 1916; he had matured and had become more manly. He spoke clearly about military matters. But the burden of his new high office would prove too heavy for him … He had great aspirations and gave a great deal in many fields. He felt the internal political difficulties of the Dual Monarchy, sought a union of the people of Austria under the Habsburg banner, but at the same time could not persuade Hungary to adopt a less selfish policy and to abolish its barriers to food exports to Austria. A characteristic example of his behaviour was his pardoning of Czech leaders who had often worked against the monarchy. His concerns for the Czech national movement, and the overall weakness of the government and the monarchy, were thus obvious. The result was encouragement for the divergent nationalist causes and great distrust of the Germans [i.e. the German-speaking people of the Austro-Hungarian Empire] who remained true to their old imperial house. The army too was offended, particularly the German officers and soldiers who stuck to their old-school devotion to the ruling house and the Dual Monarchy. A great many of their German brothers met a bloody end as a result of Czech desertions to the enemy.[485]

For the Germans, the year had started with a clear plan of how the war was to be won: the Russians had been neutralised as a result of the battles of 1915, and could be held at arm's length while Falkenhayn brought the French to the point of collapse at Verdun. As the year ended, this plan had proved to be as much a mirage as the Schlieffen Plan in 1914, and there was a desperate need for a new strategy. Ludendorff's assessment of the state of affairs at the end of 1916 was fairly accurate.[486] The French had clearly suffered huge losses but remained committed to the war, drawing heavily on the human resources of their colonies to help restore their armies to strength; the British continued to increase the strength of their field armies; the Russians had finally implemented longstanding proposals to reduce the strength of each division to twelve infantry battalions and each battery to six guns, making the 'surplus' available to create new divisions; the Romanian Army was re-equipping and retraining, largely under French guidance, in Moldavia; and it could be expected that the pro-Venizelos forces in Greece would grow stronger, giving the Anglo-French forces in Macedonia a valuable source of reinforcements. A new approach had to be found to break the will of one or more of the Entente Powers before the pressure they exerted on Germany – which now also had to prop up the increasingly ailing Austro-Hungarian Empire – became overwhelming.

Accordingly, there were two developments in the last weeks of the year. The first was the result of discussions in German military and political circles that had continued throughout the war about the role of the navy's U-boat fleet. In 1915, the Germans had conducted unrestricted submarine warfare in the waters around Britain. The strategy led to growing tension with the United States, which demanded that Germany respect the rights of American citizens to travel as passengers through the 'war zone' that the Germans had declared; the Germans pointed out that the British had declared a similar war zone in the North Sea and the United States had not made such demands of the British government, but by the end of August the German Navy had been ordered to abandon the policy of attacking all vessels without warning. At the end of 1916, Admiral Henning von Holtzendorff, the chief of staff of the navy, submitted a memorandum to Kaiser Wilhelm calling for the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare. His reasoning was founded on the claim that such a campaign would bring Britain to its knees in five months. To justify this, he argued that Britain was greatly dependent upon imported wheat, and that a new campaign of unrestricted attacks would sink at least 600,000 tons of shipping per month, leaving too few vessels to supply Britain with all its needs. The campaign ultimately failed, and closer analysis in 1916 might have revealed the flaws in Holtzendorff's reasoning. Britain's ability to cope with shortages was far more robust than he had predicted, and not only did he not take account of the ability of the British to adapt and improvise, he also failed to produce any justification for why Britain would prove so fragile. The estimates of how many ships were involved in sustaining the supply of wheat to Britain were largely guesswork, and the defensive impact of the convoy system was badly underestimated. Far more predictably, the German Navy lacked the number of submarines that would be required to give the campaign any realistic chance of success. Nevertheless, for a country that was suffering so much from food shortages, it was understandable that many should have been attracted to the notion of inflicting similar or worse shortages on Germany's enemy.[487]

The other major development of December 1916 was in completely the opposite direction from the belligerent and aggressive promotion of unrestricted submarine warfare. Almost in reaction to the dangerous step being proposed by Holtzendorff, President Woodrow Wilson of the United States had made suggestions the previous winter that he might be prepared to mediate between the warring powers, but the American proposals were predicated upon the restoration of Belgian independence, the return of Alsace and Lorraine to France, and rights of access for Russian warships through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, without offering the Central Powers very much in return. Given the widespread perception in Germany that the United States had consistently favoured the Entente Powers since 1914, there was considerable hostility to any proposal from Washington. The tentative American moves came to a halt during 1916 until the end of the American presidential campaign in November, but some in the German government sensed an opportunity to find a way out of the ruinous war, even if others such as Ludendorff seized upon Wilson's postponement of discussions until the end of the election campaign as a further sign that the United States could not be trusted to conduct fair negotiations.[488] With growing calls for unrestricted submarine warfare, Johann Heinrich von Bernstorff, the German ambassador in Washington, was instructed to suggest to the Americans that they should propose once more to mediate, but this time without mentioning territorial concessions – if they did not, Germany might be forced to adopt the drastic option of unleashing its U-boats.

At the same time, Stephan Burián, the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister, repeated calls that he had made earlier in the war for an appeal to all powers to discuss peace terms. Whilst the German chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg was attracted to the suggestion, he was also concerned that it might be interpreted by Germany's enemies – and by his enemies in Germany itself – as a sign of weakness. Ludendorff and others agreed with his assessment, and it was concluded that it would be better to wait until the fall of Bucharest, in order to give at least the appearance of negotiating from a position of strength. In the meantime, Burián developed his proposals further, listing a series of objectives: Belgium would be restored to independence but Germany would have to receive guarantees to protect its interests, and the Belgian colony of the Congo would be given to Germany; the 1914 frontiers of France, Germany and Austria-Hungary would not be diminished; Poland would be granted independence; Russia would lose Lithuania and Courland to Germany; and there would be territorial realignments in the Balkans. Detailed discussions followed between different bodies, including *OHL*, resulting in Burián's stipulations being extended. The Germans wished to keep control of a coal-rich part of northeast France until the French paid a substantial indemnity, and Hindenburg and others demanded that Luxembourg should become part of the German Empire. In addition, they wanted Britain to pay an indemnity for the restoration of Belgian independence, though this was later dropped by Bethmann-Hollweg.

Partly as an intermediate step in preparing for such a peace conference, Germany and Austria-Hungary announced the creation of the Kingdom of Poland on 5 November 1916, consisting of the territories of Poland that had been seized from Russia and parts of adjoining Lithuania. The new Poland would not be fully independent; it would be tied economically to the Central Powers, and its foreign policy controlled by Germany. As the Romanian campaign began to wind down, Bethmann-Hollweg sent the modified Burián proposals to the Bulgarian and Turkish governments to seek their approval. With this secured, Bethmann-Hollweg instructed Bernstorff to ask Wilson's government whether it intended to renew its mediation proposals. There were tentative signs that the Americans intended to renew their call for a conference of all the belligerents, but – spurred on by the arrival of Mackensen's forces in Bucharest – Bethmann-Hollweg decided that this was a fortuitous moment for Germany to make a peace proposal without appearing to be weak. The ambassadors of the United States, Spain and Switzerland were informed of the proposal on the morning of 12 December, and that it was to be read to the Reichstag in the form of a statement:

> The most formidable war known to history has been ravaging a great part of the world for two and a half years. That catastrophe … threatens to bury under its ruins the moral and physical progress on which Europe prided itself at the dawn of the 20th century. In that strife Germany and her allies, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey, have given proof of their indestructible strength in winning considerable successes … The latest events [in Romania] have demonstrated that a continuation of the war cannot break their power to resist … It was for the defence of their existence and freedom of their national development that the four allied powers were constrained to take up arms … Not for an instant have they swerved from the conviction that the respect of the rights of the other nations is not in any degree incompatible with their own rights and legitimate interests. They do not seek to crush or annihilate their adversaries. Conscious of their military and economic strength and ready to carry on to the end, if they must … but animated at the same time by the desire to stem the flood of blood and to bring the horrors of war to an end, the four allied powers propose to enter even now into peace negotiations.[489]

The US government was well aware of the pressure within Germany for the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare and Wilson gave the statement a guarded welcome. He called on all of the combatant powers to state their aims and the conditions in which they might be prepared to bring hostilities to an end. Although they had drawn up a list of their conditions, the Central Powers were reluctant to reveal their hand, and Wilson suggested that all submissions should be made on the understanding that the government of the United States would regard them as strictly confidential. Again, the Germans declined, stating that a peace conference – which they stipulated had to be held in Europe – was the right venue for such matters. The Entente Powers responded to Washington on 30 December, stating that they regarded the Central Powers as responsible for the war and that the rights of Belgium were paramount.

It is intriguing to speculate on a peace that might have emerged had the process been continued. But in Germany, the clamour for unrestricted submarine warfare was becoming irresistible, and Bethmann-Hollweg conceded that preparations should begin in January; to a very large extent, he and Burián had been outmanoeuvred by those in favour of Holtzendorff's proposals. Both the preparations and discussions for unrestricted submarine warfare on the one hand and the tentative peace proposals on the other had taken place in parallel, with little or no attempt to coordinate or choose between the two. In vain, Wilson called upon all nations to consider a 'peace without victory', but it was too late. Germany was set upon a path that would ultimately draw the United States into the camp of its enemies.[490] A peace without victory would have been anathema to those in Germany who would have regarded it as a betrayal of all those who had died in the years of fighting, and the growing impact of the British naval blockade led to repeated demands for sufficient territory to be seized to prevent Germany from being brought to such a dangerous state in future. The German response to Wilson's latest call coincided with the announcement that unrestricted submarine warfare was about to commence; the response of the United States was to break off diplomatic relations with Germany.

The announcement of the creation of the Kingdom of Poland came in the form of the 'Act of 5 November', a joint declaration by Kaiser Wilhelm and Emperor Franz Joseph. The intention was for the Regency Council, consisting of Cardinal Aleksander Kakowski, the Archbishop of Warsaw, Prince Zdzisław Lubomirski, the Mayor of Warsaw, and the conservative politician Jósef Ostrowski, to appoint a German prince as ruler, but from the outset there were constant arguments about the candidacy. Somewhat to the irritation of the Germans, the Regency Council decided to pass all its powers to Józef Piłsudski, the commander of the Polish Legion. He refused to swear allegiance to Germany, and appeals for Polish recruits to join the war against Russia failed to yield the large numbers that the Central Powers had confidently predicted. Matters were worsened by continuing friction between the two allies. Austro-Hungarian officials remained concerned that if Poland were to be a future satellite of Germany, this would only serve to enhance further the dominance of Berlin; consequently, individuals like Zeynek, the former chief of staff of Pflanzer-Baltin's Seventh Army and now working in the Operations Bureau of the *k.u.k.* Army, actively undermined attempts to create a military force that would be entirely subservient to the German Army.[491]

Despite the failure of the Act of 5 November to provide a flood of new recruits for the war effort, the declaration by the Central Powers concentrated the minds of others with interests in Poland. The Russians had already issued a proclamation at the beginning of the war calling for all Poles – but particularly those in the regions of Poland under German and Austro-Hungarian control – to unite in a new Poland, which would still be a part of the Russian Empire. Now, Gurko, who as will be described later became acting chief of the Russian general staff at the end of 1916, urged the tsar to go further and agree to full Polish independence; in typical indecisive fashion, Nicholas agreed to a statement that implied, but did not guarantee, such a change. For the moment, the precise future status of Poland remained unresolved, but it was increasingly clear to everyone that there would be no return to the *status quo ante*. In some form or other, there would be a Polish state after the end of the war.

Hindenburg came to personify many of the views of the hard-liners in Germany. He cast an immense shadow in every respect: he was a heavily built man who stood six feet five inches (1.96m) tall, and he and his supporters had assiduously built his reputation as the man who saved East Prussia at Tannenberg and whose appointment to overall command on the Eastern Front coincided with the end of Russian successes in 1916. During his time on the Eastern Front, he had become an increasingly strong supporter for those who demanded major territorial acquisitions in the east, and both he and Ludendorff regarded the division between civilian and military spheres of influence as unnecessary and harmful – Germany could only survive in the face of the ring of enemies that surrounded it if all the nation's resources were put to use to bring the war to a satisfactory conclusion. Within days of coming to power in what became known as the Third *OHL*, Hindenburg and Ludendorff commenced on a programme of changes that was intended to affect every part of Germany. The army would be modernised, with assault battalions trained in the new methods of warfare that had proved so effective in the east, and all military doctrine would be reviewed and modernised to reflect the realities of trench warfare in the industrial age.

An abiding problem for all of the nations involved in the war was manpower. The huge losses in the front line – the relatively successful and quick campaign of the Central Powers in Romania still resulted in their suffering 60,000 casualties – left the fighting formations in a weakened state, increasingly dependent on replacement drafts that had not been adequately trained or prepared, and the need to send so many men to the front left both agriculture and industry at home struggling to cope. Oberst Max Bauer, an artillery specialist who had served with Ludendorff during the fighting at Liège in 1914, was now serving on the staff of *OHL*, where he had been one of those who actively plotted against Falkenhayn on behalf of Hindenburg and Ludendorff, often serving as an intermediary between the latter and the industrialist and politician Gustav Stresemann, one of the leading proponents of major annexations in the east.[492] Bauer produced a memorandum at the end of August 1916 calling for greater use of machinery such as flamethrowers in the army to make up for the shortages of men, and in line with this, Hindenburg and Ludendorff drew up plans for a major increase in the provision of machine-guns and trench mortars; this increase in the firepower of small units would have the additional benefit that in future, any isolated group of soldiers would be better equipped to continue fighting on its own. It was hoped that this would allow them to avoid surrendering in the first phase of an enemy attack.

However, this proposal required German industry to increase its production of both weapons and ammunition at a time when it too was struggling with workforce shortages. To deal with that, a series of steps termed the 'Hindenburg Programme' was implemented. Ludendorff summarised the situation as seen from *OHL*:

> The war obliged us to call on the last reserves of manpower and to make them available. Whether it was for combat or for other service in the home army and in the civil service was all the same. An individual man could only serve the homeland in one place, but his strength must be put to use. The civil service was another matter. Overall, relative importance in general between the army, navy and the homeland was assessed by *OHL* in consultation with the homeland administrations. Only *OHL* could oversee these approximations.[493]

In other words, Ludendorff intended to ensure that it was the army that controlled the distribution of manpower. General Wilhelm Groener, who had led the railway section of *OHL* at the outbreak of the war and had most recently been in charge of arranging shipments of food from Romania to Germany, was appointed head of the newly configured *Kriegsamt* or war office, as part of the war ministry. However, its role was to allow Ludendorff – who was Groener's superior in the chain of command – effectively to exert control over several functions of the war ministry, which were now subordinated to the new office: the procurement of labour, armaments, clothing, food and raw materials. The departments of Groener's administration that were responsible for these tasks were staffed with technocrats rather than politicians and civil servants with the expectation that they would be able to make the machinery of procurement function more effectively, but Hermann von Stein, the war minister, was resentful of the influence of the war office and attempted – with varying success – to limit its powers and reach. Nor were the obstacles placed in Groener's path entirely due to bureaucratic infighting. The war ministry had carefully calculated the rate at which armaments and munitions production could be accelerated without leading to shortages of raw materials, and the excessive demands of the Hindenburg Programme destabilised the detailed plans that had been made for a gradual increase in production. As a result, production of some items actually fell.

All military industries in Germany were hamstrung by shortages of skilled workers. In an attempt to alleviate these problems, the army released over 100,000 specialists and smaller or inefficient producers were forcibly closed, with their workforce being redeployed in other factories. Proposals were now drafted to increase the maximum age of military service to 50, and to place all workers up to the age of 60 at the disposal of war-supporting industries. Whilst some – particularly the industrialists who supported Hindenburg and who saw the promised annexation of territory in the east as a means of expanding their businesses – enthusiastically embraced this measure others were far less keen, and many were openly hostile. To date, all parts of German society had succeeded in maintaining a high level of unity, but some feared that the compulsion that this law represented would alienate workers who would then be less inclined to work hard.

Groener was given the task of drawing up the relevant legislation and the publishing of a *Vaterländischer Hilfsdienstgesetzt* or Patriotic Auxiliary Service Law followed, listing several steps that would address Germany's workforce shortages. This law would require all men aged 18–60 who were not already serving in the army to be available for work in the new *Hilfsdienst*, which would provide a workforce for areas such as agriculture and forestry as well as heavy industry. Committees that included at least one military officer would decide when any given business had a surplus of workers who could be moved elsewhere. In an attempt to head off trade union criticism, Groener included systems for workers to appeal against the functioning of the *Hilfsdienst*, but opposition in the Reichstag resulted in a series of further concessions such as the requirement for any organisation with fifty or more workers to have workers' councils, much to the irritation of Ludendorff and other proponents of 'total war':

> [The Patriotic Auxiliary Service Law] was neither fish nor fowl; we had wanted something rather different. The design of the law had changed so much from the basis of overall compulsory service that we had proposed in September and did not guarantee the greatest use of compulsory labour. In practice, this law – particularly in the manner it was implemented – was merely a changeling, and no longer had anything in common with our proposal to place the entire population at the service of the Fatherland and thus gain manpower for the army and workforce. In the text of the law only the first paragraph remained of what *OHL* had actually desired.
>
> Also, women were not included in its measures; women were available to replace men in the workplace and to release them for field service.
>
> Despite everything, I welcomed the law at first. As a sign to friend and foe of our willingness to continue the war, it was of great value … together with our successes in Romania, it had to make a strong impression.[494]

The military situation continued to develop, albeit at an incremental rate. At the end of the conquest of Serbia by the Central Powers in late 1915, the Anglo-French forces that had landed at Salonika with the intention of being sent to help the Serbs had been left holding a small enclave on the coast of the Aegean Sea. At the time, Mackensen had wanted to explore the possibility of an attack to destroy this pocket, but Falkenhayn had decided against such an operation on the grounds that supply difficulties would be too great, and that British and French warships off the coast would provide powerful fire support for the defences. At the constant urging of the Romanians, the Entente forces in Macedonia attacked repeatedly in the autumn of 1916, slowly grinding their way forward through the mountainous terrain. The overall advance was not great – perhaps no more than 15 miles (25km) – but the town of Monastir passed into Entente hands. Both sides lost over 50,000 men in the fighting, and the Greek state was completely destabilised; the Greek King Constantine I was strongly pro-German and ordered his army not to fight against German and Bulgarian forces when they launched their spoiling attacks in August in an attempt to derail the Entente offensive, but the result was that much of the army rebelled, siding with ousted Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos and formed the Provisional Government of National Defence in Salonika as a pro-Entente administration.

The relationship between Falkenhayn during his period at *OHL* and Conrad, his Austro-Hungarian counterpart, had always been difficult and had deteriorated steadily with time. Consequently, Conrad had welcomed the replacement of Falkenhayn by Hindenburg, feeling that he would be able to work much better with men who had personal experience of the Eastern Front. If he had expected a relationship of equals, he was deeply disappointed. There could be no question that Germany was the dominant partner in the alliance of the Central Powers, and whilst Hindenburg and Ludendorff treated Conrad with more cordiality than Falkenhayn had shown, they remorselessly asserted Germany's ascendancy at every opportunity. Shortly after Hindenburg's appointment as chief of the general staff, Conrad received a visit from an old friend, Heinrich Freiherr von Tucher. The men had known each other for several years and Tucher was currently serving as the Bavarian ambassador in Vienna; in his opinion, he told Conrad, Austria should consider becoming part of the German Empire, much in the manner of Bavaria. At the time, Conrad utterly rejected such a diminution of Austrian status, not least because he could see that it might result in Hungary leaving the empire and the division of the *k.u.k.* Army along national lines. Although the *k.u.k.* Army contributed 46 per cent of the forces used by the Central Powers in Romania, compared to only 22 per cent contributed by Germany, it was German planning and leadership that was credited with the victory, dashing Conrad's hopes that both his and his army's prestige might receive a welcome boost.

In any event, Conrad's star was setting. In his private correspondence with his wife, he appeared to be growing increasingly weary of the war, and shortly before his death, Franz Joseph had discussed possible candidates to replace Conrad as chief of the general staff. Archduke Karl advised against dismissing Conrad for the moment, but although Conrad was promoted to *Generalfeldmarschall* in late November, his influence was greatly diminished. Karl took personal control of the *k.u.k.* Army in December, with the former commander, Archduke Frederick, as his assistant, and it rapidly became clear that the new commander-in-chief would be no simple figurehead. At the beginning of 1917, Karl ordered that *AOK*'s long sojourn at Teschen was to end and that the general staff were to move to Baden, to the south of Vienna; Conrad protested in vain that Teschen was within easy driving distance of *OHL* at Pless. The comfortable life at Teschen was replaced by a new regime in which wives were not permitted to accompany staff officers (though the Empress Zita was not covered by this rule, much to Conrad's irritation). Finally, on 27 February, Conrad was informed that he was being dismissed as chief of the general staff. His new assignment would be as commander of the *k.u.k.* army group in the Tyrol, and he would be replaced by Arz. At first, Conrad was minded to decline the new post on the Italian front and to ask for permission to retire, but Karl persuaded him to continue with his military service.[495]

Conrad had been chief of the Austro-Hungarian general staff since 1906, with a one-year break in 1911–12. His extensive role in training officers and writing military doctrine meant that the army that Austria-Hungary sent to war in 1914 was very much his creation. It is therefore difficult to avoid the conclusion that all of its failings should be laid at his door, not least because he compounded doctrinal mistakes that he had devised by the manner in which he attempted to use the army once hostilities began. He interfered disastrously with mobilisation in 1914; he failed to recognise that the tide had turned against his forces in eastern Galicia in September 1914, resulting in what might have been a tactical setback becoming a major defeat; he allowed troops to be left besieged in Przemyśl – twice – and then obstinately persisted in bloody and futile attacks in the Carpathians as he attempted to relieve the fortress; and allowed his personal enmity to persuade him to try to knock the 'treacherous Italians' out of the war by moving forces from the Eastern Front on the eve of the Brusilov Offensive. This was certainly the view of Seeckt, who wrote that the training of the *k.u.k.* Army was deficient in many respects, particularly of replacement drafts who were rushed to the front with little preparation, and that the decisions of officers at all levels were frequently irrational, particularly in the manner in which higher commands ignored the realities of terrain and logistics. In this latter respect, though, the same criticism could have been levelled at several other armies of the era.[496]

Conrad's presence in the Tyrol led the Italians to believe that the presence of this senior officer who made no secret of his abiding hatred of Italy meant that the *k.u.k.* Army would attack from this direction. Instead, Conrad watched with dismay as troops were moved steadily from his command to the Isonzo. He remained a commander on what was largely a subsidiary front until his dismissal in July 1918, largely as a scapegoat for another failed Austro-Hungarian offensive; although his troops were involved in the failure, the true blame lay with Karl's *AOK*. Given the tendency of Conrad during his tenure of office at *AOK* to dismiss field commanders for mistakes that were actually his responsibility, there is a degree of irony in this. By this stage, the increasingly disastrous state of the war had left Conrad full of despair for the future of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and he retired and withdrew from public life. He died in 1925, and immediately there was a surge of interest in his writings. Many hailed him as a visionary genius, pointing out that he had introduced many innovations, such as the military purchase of areas of countryside to create more realistic training environments. They also suggested that almost every German success on the Eastern Front was based upon suggestions made by Conrad. However, they ignored the fact that he had made so many suggestions, it was almost inevitable that any plan adopted could be claimed to have originated with him. The Austro-Hungarian Empire paid a huge price in blood for his refusal to modify his own beliefs after the opening months of the war had shown major flaws in his doctrine, and his Hitler-like treatment of weakened divisions as if they were still at full strength.

Just as 1916 proved to be a year of dashed hopes for Germany, it saw Russia plunged into deepening gloom. The previous year had seen a series of defeats, starting with the winter fighting in Masuria followed by the great advance of Mackensen's armies through Galicia and on into Russia itself. However, as the year came to an end, the Russian Army had reasserted itself when it inflicted a major defeat upon the *k.u.k.* Army between Rovno and Lutsk, and confidence had returned. The pointless slaughter in Southwest Front and then around Lake Naroch in early 1916 rapidly dispelled the optimism that had developed in the winter, and although the successes of Brusilov's armies provided a welcome boost, they were followed by futile attacks that cost huge casualties for no gain. The troops who had been trained in anticipation of a successful summer – the *Polivanovtsy* who had reluctantly entered the army the previous winter – were largely gone. Even elite formations such as the Guards were made up of replacement drafts of variable quality. As early as late October, Alfred Knox found evidence of growing unrest in the ranks:

> I hear whispers that the Russian infantry has lost heart and that anti-war propaganda is rife in the ranks. It is little wonder that they are downhearted after being driven to the slaughter over the same ground seven times in about a month, and every time taking trenches where their guns could not keep them. However, I do not attach importance to this, for they will be fresh again next spring.[497]

The news from the Russian interior was no better. Towards the end of October, workers in the Viborg district of Petrograd went on strike. When the police intervened, the workers turned on them; unable to control the crowd, the police summoned help and troops from nearby barracks were dispatched. Instead of helping the police, many of the soldiers fired on them and it took the intervention of a force of Cossacks to restore order. The reliability of the army, which had saved the tsar in 1905, could no longer be taken for granted.[498]

The forces that Zayontchovsky had taken to Romania had been reorganised as Sakharov's Army of the Danube, numbering 60,000. This diversion of men and resources effectively brought all thoughts of offensive operations elsewhere to an end, though there was a local attack in the northern sector of the front during the winter. The Russians had known for much of the year that *Ober Ost* had been withdrawing troops from relatively quiet sectors in order to provide reinforcements for the fighting further south, and a surprise assault was planned for the Tukums–Mitau sector in Latvia. Instead of a lengthy preparation phase with the movement of heavy artillery, ammunition and reinforcements, local forces were quickly concentrated and attacked the Germans by surprise with little or no artillery preparation. Making a virtue out of necessity, there the Russian infantry advanced in small groups rather than the mass tactics of previous assaults and rapidly gained their objectives; about 8,000 Germans were taken prisoner, together with several guns.[499]

In November, Alexeyev had to take leave of absence from *Stavka* on account of illness. His replacement was Vasili Gurko, who had enjoyed a rapid rise from the commander of a cavalry division in 1914 to leading the Special Army for much of 1916. Gurko was surprised by his sudden appointment, and travelled first to meet Brusilov in Berdichev for a brief conference before travelling on to Mogilev:

> [At *Stavka*,] the first person whose presence astonished me was General Zhilinsky, whom I had thought was at the French headquarters. It was explained that, not long before the illness of General Alexeyev, he was called from France on the plausible pretence of giving a personal report on the work of his mission, but in reality it was in order to replace him … Soon the door from His Majesty's cabinet was opened and I was asked to enter. After the first words of greeting, I considered it my duty to assure the tsar that my appointment to *Stavka* was quite unexpected …
>
> I pointed out the difficulties of a temporary occupation of such a responsible position, but the rule I would lay down would be that I would carry out my duties as though they were confided in me permanently, not binding myself implicitly to the plans of my predecessor, though knowing General Alexeyev I thought that we should not clash in serious things.[500]

In Petrograd, the conspirators who had long wished to strike against Rasputin finally made their move at the end of 1916 in a manner that was as chaotic and ham-fisted as any episode in the closing months of the history of tsarist Russia. Rasputin was widely regarded as having huge influence on Tsarina Alexandra, who in turn was thought to be interfering too much in the affairs of her husband who had appointed her as regent while he was at *Stavka*. Prince Felix Felixovich Yusupov, an extremely wealthy aristocrat, was a key instigator in the murder, and Knox later heard an account of events from a Russian noblewoman, probably Countess Marianna Erlkovna von Pistohlkors, who was alleged to have been present:

> Yusupov had often invited Rasputin to come to see his house. On the day in question he demurred, as he had been warned by the police that he should not go out. He was, however, persuaded. There were present the Grand Duke Dimitri Pavlovich, the Duma member [Vladimir] Purishkevich [a right-wing politician and outspoken critic both of Rasputin and the manner in which the tsar was conducting affairs], an officer named [Sergei] Sukotin [a Guards officer recuperating from wounds and friend of Yusupov's mother], a doctor [Stanislaus de Lazovert] and Yusupov. They had prepared port, a poisoned bottle on a side table, and an un-poisoned bottle, poisoned pink cakes, and unpoisoned chocolate cakes. At first Rasputin refused to drink, but later took three glasses of the poisoned port and ate several of the pink cakes. The poison seemed to have no effect, so Dimitri Pavlovich and Yusupov retired upstairs to consult. It was decided to kill by shooting.
>
> Yusupov took Dimitri Pavlovich's revolver and went down and took a seat at the table beside Rasputin, hiding the revolver in his left hand. He watched his victim for a long time, and wondered morbidly what it would feel like to shoot him: imagined the look that would come into his eyes, the scream he would utter, and how the blood would spurt. He felt he could not shoot him while sitting beside him, so drew his attention to an old crystal crucifix at the other side of the room, and, as he walked over to look at it more closely, followed him and shot him in the back. Rasputin fell with a piercing scream. The doctor said he was in his death-agony, and the whole party adjourned upstairs.
>
> They returned some three-quarters of an hour later. The Grand Duke went out to get his car to dispose of the body and left the door open behind him. Yusupov was surprised to find that Rasputin's hands were not yet cold, and was kneeling down to feel his heart, when the monk opened his eyes and, calling him a murderer, stumbled to his feet and out of the door. They pursued him to the garden, where after a general fusillade, Purishkevich dispatched him with a bullet in the neck.
>
> The police came, but were quieted by a bribe of 100 roubles and a story that Yusupov had shot a dog. After they had gone, Yusupov's servant and the dvornik [the doorman] dragged the body into the house. At this point one of the party's nerves became temporarily deranged, throwing himself on the body and digging his nails into the flesh, so that he got up all covered with blood.
>
> A sorry story altogether, and a fitting prelude to much that has happened since![501]

Rasputin's body was dumped in the Neva, but air trapped in the canvas in which he was wrapped prevented him from sinking, and he was found under the river ice. There were contradictory claims about whether there was water in his lungs when an autopsy was performed; the significance of this is that it was traditional in Orthodox Russia that those who had died of drowning could not become saints, and it was therefore in the interests of some to claim that he had still been alive when he was thrown into the river.

The response of the tsar and tsarina was predictable. It is impossible to believe that they were not aware of the general dislike of Rasputin, yet they had adhered to him despite the widely known corruption of many of his associates. Now that such a prominent member of the tsarina's inner circle was dead and the fact that large parts of Petrograd society knew who had been responsible for his death, the royal couple felt that they had to act. Nicholas was chairing a conference of all the front commanders at *Stavka* but travelled in haste to Tsarskoe Selo, the palace immediately south of Petrograd where Alexandra was staying. Gurko was left to continue the conference at which he was not empowered to make any decisions. Nevertheless, the reduction in size of existing divisions in order to release sufficient men for sixty new infantry divisions was agreed. These would be used to increase the strength of each infantry corps to three divisions instead of two; the intention was that at any one time, one division would be resting and re-training in the rear. The low opinion of the tsar in the eyes of senior military figures fell still further, as Brusilov recorded:

> I do not know about the other front commanders, but I left very disappointed, seeing clearly that the state machine was finally faltering and that our ship of state was moving on the stormy waves of the sea of life without a rudder and a commander. It was easy to foresee that, under these conditions, this unfortunate ship could easily run against an obstacle and perish – not from the actions of an enemy, nor from internal strife, but from a lack of governance and common sense on the part of those fated to stand at the helm.[502]

The conspirators who had murdered Rasputin were effectively immune from prosecution. As a member of the Duma, Purishkevich could not be arrested, and members of the aristocracy could only be detained by order of the tsar. Alexandra did in fact order Yusupov and Dimitri Pavlovich to be placed under house arrest. Even though she was acting as regent, she exceeded her authority and thus alienated any lingering support for her in Russian aristocratic circles. There was plentiful evidence of the involvement of the conspirators in the killing – they had even boasted about it to the police, and bloodstains were found in the Yusupov Palace – and Alexandra urged summary executions. Grand Duke Andrei Vladimirovich was particularly strident in his condemnation of the actions of Alexandra:

> This means open revolt. Here we have the war, with the enemy threatening us from all sides, and we have to deal with this sort of nonsense. How can they not be ashamed to stir up all this fuss over the murder of such a filthy good-for-nothing![503]

Despite issuing statements that nobody should be above the law, Nicholas chose not to take decisive action. Instead, he effectively banished the men, sending Yusupov to his country estate in Kursk and Dimitri Pavlovich to the Caucasian front.

While much of Russian society rejoiced at the news of Rasputin's death, Nicholas moved against several politicians who had attracted the ire of the tsarina. Alexander Protopopov, the minister of the interior, was one of Alexandra's protégés, and Prime Minister Alexander Trepov, who had been appointed to the post in November 1916, had repeatedly demanded Protopopov's dismissal. He owed his own position to the intervention of the mother of the tsar, the dowager Tsarina Maria, who had persuaded her son to sack the deeply unpopular Stürmer. Inevitably, Tsarina Alexandra had tried to save Stürmer, and deeply resented the man who had replaced him; even if Protopopov had not been one of her circle, she would have supported him purely because he opposed Trepov. After the death of Rasputin, Protopopov claimed that he received regular visits from the dead man's ghost and relayed his messages to the tsarina; despite – or perhaps because of – this absurd claim, he remained in office.[504] Instead of removing the ineffectual and sycophantic Protopopov, the tsar acted on the urging of Alexandra and dismissed Trepov, replacing him with the elderly Nikolai Golitsyn, who had not served in any government role for several decades and had begged in vain not to be appointed. War Minister Shuvayev was also dismissed; his replacement was another favourite of the tsarina, General Mikhail Belyaev. There were similar changes in the ministry of justice and the ministry of education. The last capable senior officials in the Russian administration were removed, and replaced by men who were not remotely equipped to deal with the growing crisis in the country.

In some respects, the crisis was similar to that in Germany and Austria-Hungary. There were widespread food shortages in the cities, where wages were simply too low for workers to afford the inflated prices. However badly it might have functioned, the Central Powers had introduced food rationing; by contrast, Russians were left to fend for themselves, with a few industrial concerns providing additional supplies to their workers. The war showed no signs of ending, and the stream of dead and maimed returning from the front spoke of terrible conditions in the trenches and gross mismanagement at every level. And life for the Russian aristocracy appeared to continue in its old manner, with no apparent shortages of any kind. Tsar Nicholas seemed to show no concern for the state of affairs, even though Russia's Entente partners were increasingly worried about the turn of events. George Buchanan, the British ambassador in Petrograd, wrote of his unease as early as mid-October in a letter to the foreign office in London:

> I do not wish to be ultra-pessimistic, but never since the war began have I felt so depressed about the situation here, more especially with regard to the future of Anglo-Russian relations. German influence has been making headway ever since Sazonov left the foreign office. The Germans, who during the early stages of the war, and even up to a quite recent date, were proclaiming through their agents that we were making Russia bear all the brunt of the fighting, have changed their tactics. They are now representing Great Britain, with her navy and her new armies, as the future world power, bent on prolonging the war for her own inordinate ambitions.
>
> 'It is Great Britain,' they keep on repeating, 'that is forcing Russia to continue the war and forbidding her to accept the favourable peace terms which Germany is ready to offer, and it is Great Britain, therefore, that is responsible for the privations and sufferings of her people.' …
>
> The losses which Russia has suffered are so colossal that the whole country is in mourning. So many lives have been uselessly sacrificed in the recent unsuccessful attacks against Kovel and other places, that the impression is gaining ground that it is useless continuing the struggle, and that Russia, unlike Great Britain, has nothing to gain by prolonging the war. This insidious campaign is much more difficult to meet than the old lies about our former inaction.[505]

Whilst there may have been German agents working in the manner that Buchanan described, most of the internal anti-German sentiment was directed at the tsarina and many of her supporters, such as Stürmer, who came from Baltic German families; the fact that these families had faithfully supported the tsar for centuries was ignored, and Maurice Paléologue, the French ambassador, perhaps touched on the reason in his diary when he commented that for several generations, they were 'men who are all absolutely devoted to their sovereigns but have little in common with the Russian spirit.'[506] Throughout the winter, dissent grew more public, as Knox described:

> General Alexeyev left *Stavka* on a few weeks' leave [when he was ill], and is said to have warned the tsar before his departure that the censorship of soldiers' letters

> showed that they wrote continually of the tsarina and Rasputin. It is said that the commanders-in-chief of the fronts warned His Majesty that the troops would not fight if the anarchy in the interior continued.
>
> Officers began to speak openly of the Imperial Family in conversation even with foreigners in a way that would have been impossible a few weeks earlier. A general of artillery, in discussing the disgraceful theft of magnetos from motor-cars and even of the leather from the seats of the British 4.5s in transit from Archangelsk, shrugged his shoulders and said: 'What can we do? We have Germans everywhere. The Empress is a German!'
>
> The Duma was to have assembled on 25 January, and it was thought advisable to call up the Guards Depot Cavalry Regiment from Novgorod to help in the maintenance of order. Many of the officers petitioned to be allowed to rejoin their regiments at the front rather than risk being employed in Petrograd in defence of the government. The only troops in the capital were the depot battalions of the Guards and some depot units of the line. These contained each from 8,000 to 10,000 men, most of whom had never been at the front. They were officered either by men who had been wounded at the front and who regarded their duty as a sort of convalescent leave from the rigour of the trenches, or by youths fresh from military schools. It was doubtful whether either officers or men could be relied upon in the event of civil disturbance. It was certain that, if the men went wrong, the officers were without the influence to control them. Some weeks earlier the depot battalion of the Moskovsky Regiment had refused to fire on strikers, and five officers had been cashiered and 15 men hanged.[507]

Buchanan too heard frightening reports:

> Revolution was in the air, and the only moot point was whether it would come from above or from below. A palace revolution was openly spoken of, and at a dinner at the embassy a Russian friend of mine, who had occupied a high position in the government, declared that it was a mere question whether both the Tsar and Tsarina or only the latter would be killed. On the other hand, a popular outbreak, provoked by the prevailing food shortage, might occur at any moment.[508]

Despite being widely suspected of having pro-German sympathies, Alexandra was completely committed to her adopted nation. She identified – perhaps correctly – that only the tsar could unite all of Russia; her tragedy was that she believed the only way of achieving this was the imposition of strict autocratic rule. Even this might not have been disastrous but for two fatal flaws. Those who formed her inner circle and influenced her thinking were dominated by self-serving individuals who had no true interest in the welfare of Russia as a nation; and Tsar Nicholas lacked the intelligence and resolution required of a successful autocrat. In what he felt was a desperate attempt to avert revolution, Buchanan spoke to Rodzianko, the president of the Duma, who told him that Nicholas needed to appoint a new prime minister who had the confidence not only of the tsar but of the nation as a whole, and who – most importantly – would be given freedom to appoint his own government. Such a development would have been unacceptable to Alexandra, and therefore Nicholas, but Buchanan resolved to try, and arranged an audience with the tsar at Tsarskoe Selo on 12 January.

The tsar was far more formal than usual at the start of the meeting, something that Buchanan correctly took to be a bad sign that Nicholas knew why he was coming. A conference of the Entente Powers had been arranged for early 1917 in Petrograd, and Nicholas told Buchanan that he hoped it would be the last such meeting before a final peace conference; Buchanan expressed his doubts. When asked to explain, he stated frankly that victory could only come if the Entente Powers were not only united with each other, but also were united internally within each nation. He then asked for permission to speak frankly:

> On the tsar signifying his assent, I went on to say that there was now a barrier between him and his people, and that if Russia was still united as a nation it was in opposing his present policy. The people, who had rallied so splendidly round their sovereign on the outbreak of war, had seen how hundreds of thousands of lives had been sacrificed on account of the lack of rifles and munitions; how, owing to the incompetence of the administration, there had been a severe food crisis, and – much to my surprise, the tsar himself added, 'a breakdown of the railways'. All that they wanted, I continued, was a government that would carry on the war to a victorious finish. The Duma, I had reason to know, would be satisfied if His Majesty would but appoint as President of the Council [i.e. prime minister] a man in whom both he and the nation could have confidence, and would allow him to choose his own colleagues. The tsar, while passing over this suggestion, referred by way of justification to certain changes which he had recently made in the ministry. I therefore ventured to observe that His Majesty had of late changed his ministers so often that ambassadors never knew whether the ministers of today with whom they were treating would still be ministers on the morrow.

> 'Your Majesty, if I may be permitted to say so, has but one safe course open to you – namely, to break down the barrier that separates you from your people and to regain their confidence.' Drawing himself up and looking hard at me, the tsar asked: 'Do you mean that *I* am to regain the confidence of my people or that they are to regain *my* confidence?' 'Both, sir,' I replied, 'for without such mutual confidence Russia will never win this war. Your Majesty was admirably inspired when you went to the Duma last February. Will you not go there again? Will you not speak to your people? Will you not tell them that Your Majesty, who is the father of your people, wishes to work with them to win the war? You have, sir, but to lift up your little finger, and they will once more kneel at your feet as I saw them kneel, after the outbreak of war, at Moscow.'[509]

The two men agreed that Russia needed a strong man at the head of the government, but their reasoning was very different; Buchanan wished for someone strong enough to bring Russia's disparate groups into unity, whereas Nicholas saw the role of the 'strong man' as someone who would be able to suppress the rising dissent. Buchanan criticised the appointment of men such as Protopopov, and finished by warning the tsar that if there were to be major unrest, the army could not be relied upon to restore imperial authority.

The speed at which things appeared to be unravelling in Petrograd caused widespread alarm. Paléologue recorded that there were repeated rumours of preparations for a military coup, aimed at forcing the tsar to agree a new constitution that would effectively bring an end to autocratic rule. Whether the rumours had no foundation or whether the conspirators lost their nerve, there was no move against Nicholas, but it was a sign of the growing disintegration of his rule that Nikolai Pokrovsky, the foreign minister, begged the tsar to change course to prevent a catastrophe; Nicholas refused, and also refused to accept Pokrovsky's resignation. Others also urged the tsar to change course. Shortly after Buchanan's appeal to Nicholas, Paléologue wrote in his diary:

> The most devoted servants of tsarism, and even some of those who form the monarch's ordinary entourage, are beginning to be alarmed at the pace of events.
>
> To take one example, I have just learned from a very reliable source that Admiral [Konstantin] Nilov, Aide-de-Campe General to the tsar and one of his closest personal friends, quite recently had the courage to point out to him the whole peril of the situation; he actually went so far as to beg him to send the tsarina away – as being the only thing which could still save the empire and the dynasty. Nicholas II, who is chivalrous and worships his wife, rejected the suggestion with intense scorn:

> 'The tsarina is a foreigner,' he said, 'she has no one to protect her but myself. I shall never abandon her, under any circumstances. In any case, all the charges made against her are false. Wicked lies are being told about her. But I shall know how to make her respected!'[510]

In what seemed a remarkably short period of time, the cracks that been present in the façade of tsarist Russia since the 1905 revolution – some would say for far longer than that – were suddenly spreading. The factors that accelerated their spread were not unique to Russia: weariness with the war; huge casualties; rising prices; food shortages; and political ineptitude. Perhaps the factor that made Russia more vulnerable was the autocratic nature of the tsar. It was inevitable that blame for Russia's woes would fall on him, and those few to whom he had delegated authority. His failure to respond to this in any meaningful way was intended to be a display of autocratic determination; instead, it poured fuel on a fire that was soon to break out and destroy tsarist Russia forever.

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Alexei Alexeyevich Brusilov (1853–1926), commander of the Russian Eighth Army and later of the Southwest Front. Paris, Musée D'Histoire Contemporaine, Hôtel Des Invalides. (Photo by DeAgostini/Getty Images)

General Brusilov (left) in Circassian uniform and General Nikolai Vladimirovich Ruzsky (in black staff officer's uniform). Ruzsky commanded the Northern Front from August 1916. (From the fonds of the RGAKFD in Krasnogorsk via Stavka)

General Mikhail Vasiliyevich Alexeyev, the Tsar's chief of the general staff and effective commander of the Russian Army from September 1915 until late March 1917 when he became Supreme Commander in Chief. Respected at home and abroad, Alexeyev had risen from a humble background purely on merit. (Courtesy of Andrei Simonov)

Tsar Nicholas II and General Brusilov on the Galician front in 1916. (Photo by Photo12/UIG/Getty Images)

General Lavr Georgeyevich Kornilov speaks with a senior Austrian officer during his time as a prisoner of war. He escaped back to Russia in July 1916. (From the fonds of the RGAKFD in Krasnogorsk via Stavka)

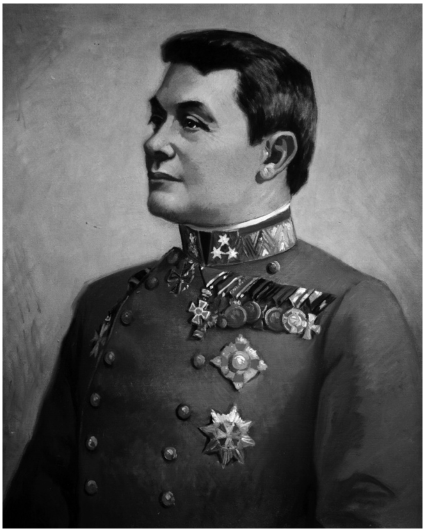
General Alexei Maximovich Kaledin, a Don Cossack cavalry officer, led the 12th Cavalry Division on the Southwest Front until his promotion to commander of Eighth Army during the Brusilov Offensive of 1916. Unhappy with the March Revolution in 1917, he returned to the Don region. (Courtesy of Andrei Simonov)

Erich von Falkenhayn, chief of the general staff and later commander of Ninth Army, speaks with German soldiers in 1916. (Photo by ullstein bild/ullstein bild via Getty Images)

Paul von Hindenburg, chief of the general staff and Erich Ludendorff, quartermaster-general, reviewing German troops in 1917. (Bettman/Getty Images)

Generalfeldmarschall August von Mackensen taking the salute from Austrian troops at the entry into Bucharest, December 1916. (TopFoto)

A portrait of Mackensen in 1915. Mackensen commanded the Central Powers forces on the Salonika front, and later in Dobruja. (©ullsteinbild/TopFoto)

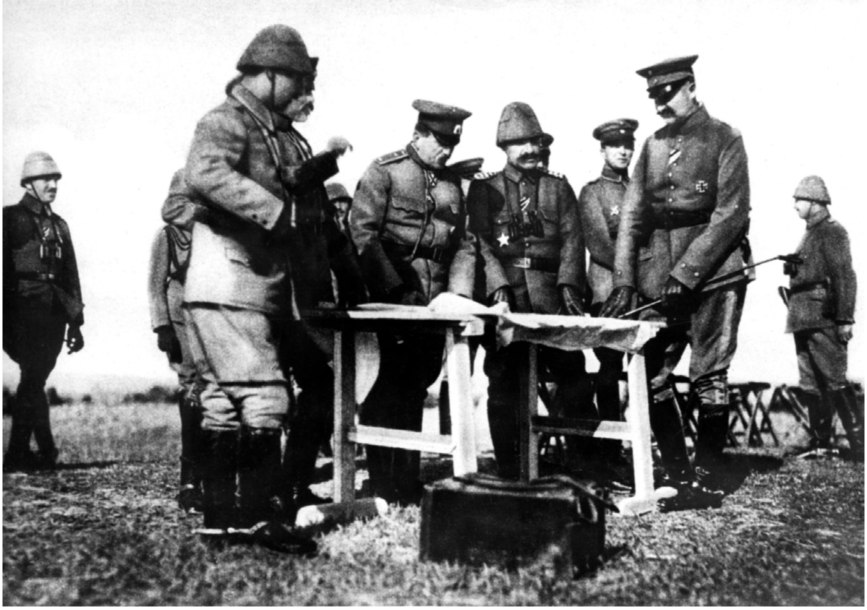


Portrait of Hermann Kövesz von Kövessháza (1854–1924), Austrian commander of Third Army. Oil on canvas from Vienna Nedomansky Studio, 1916. Rovereto, Castello Museo Storico Italiano Della Guerra. (Photo by DeAgostini/ Getty Images)

Karl von Pflanzer-Baltin, commander of the Austro-Hungarian Seventh Army, pictured here in 1915. (Photo by A. & E. Frankl/ullstein bild via Getty Images)

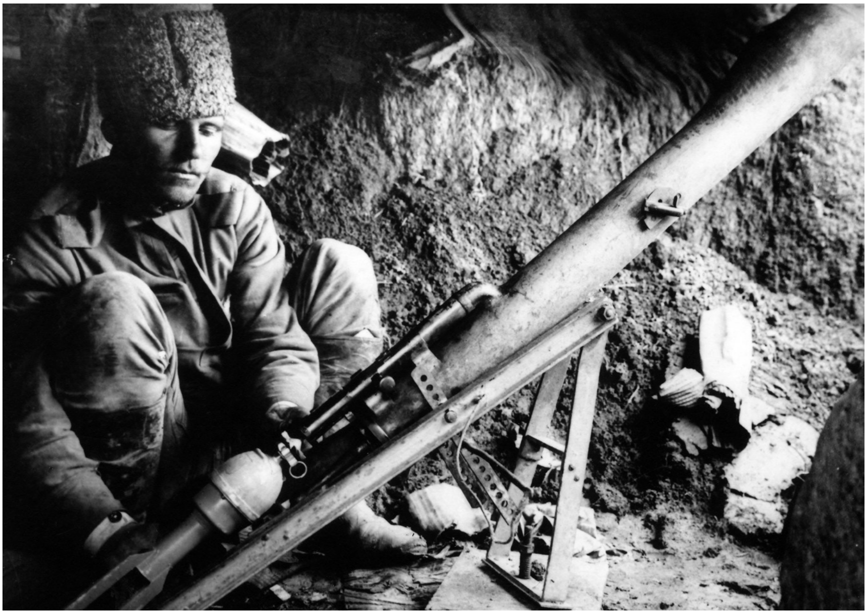
Austrian chief of the general staff Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf in conversation with Archbishop Josef Theodorowicz of Lemberg (Lvov). The Archbishop was the leader of the Armenian Catholics, one of many groups that suffered under the Russian occupation of Austrian lands during 1915–16. (From the fonds of the RGAKFD in Krasnogorsk via Stavka)

Romanian officer and politician Alexandru Averescu (1859–1938), commander of Second Army, then Third Army and later Second Army again. Photograph taken in about 1900. (Photo by General Photographic Agency/Hulton Archive/Getty Images)



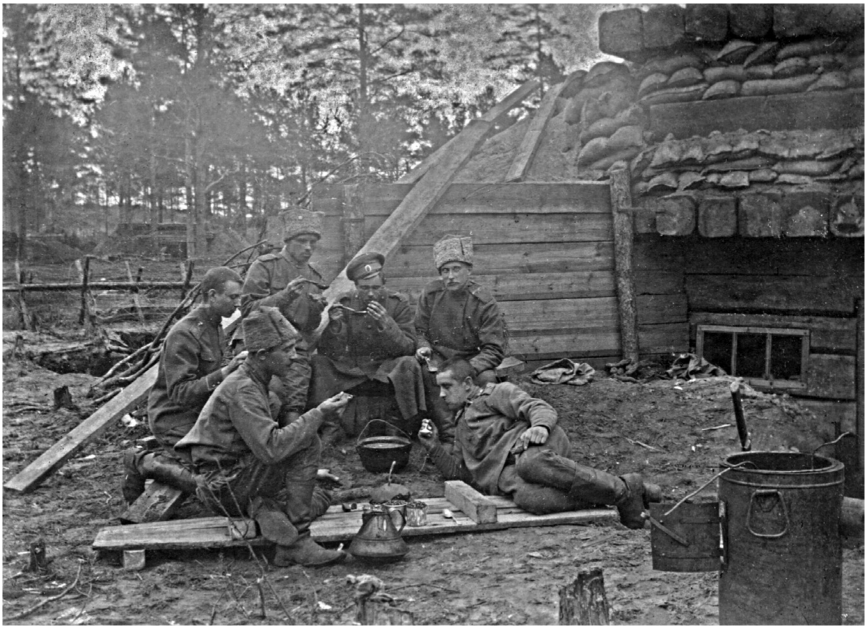
Mustapha Hilmi Pasha, commander of the Turkish troops and General Stefan Toshev, commander of the Bulgarian Third Army at Dobruja, Romania, planning their campaign at the observatory post during the action at Medgidia 1916. (TopFoto)

Generalfeldmarschall the Archduke Frederick of Austria, commander of the *k.u.k.* Army from the war's outbreak until late 1917, and his staff. (From the fonds of the RGAKFD in Krasnogorsk via Stavka)

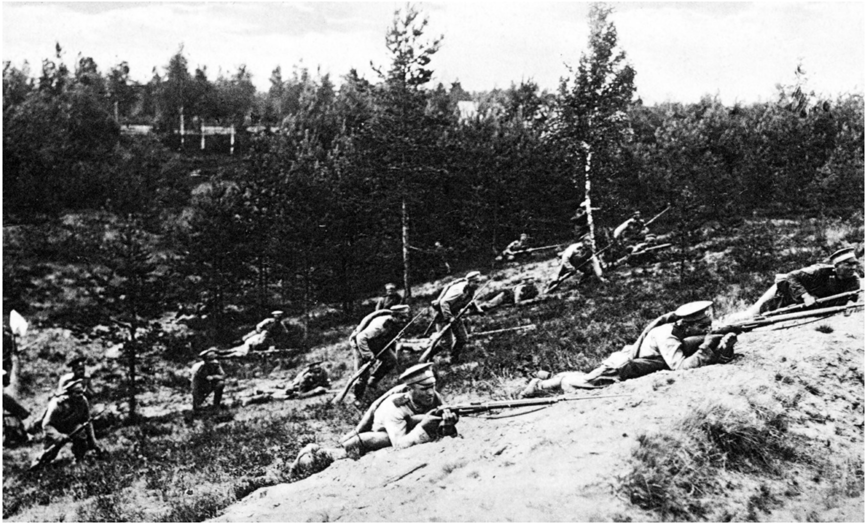


A French-made Assen mortar deployed in its close support role. It weighed 25kgs and so was easily man-portable over rough terrain. Its calibre was 75mm and its range 400m. (From the fonds of the RGAKFD in Krasnogorsk via Stavka)

A battery of Obuchkov M1904 152mm guns prepares to fire. Although obsolete almost before it left the drawing board, this piece served throughout the war on all fronts. (Nik Cornish at www.Stavka.org.uk)

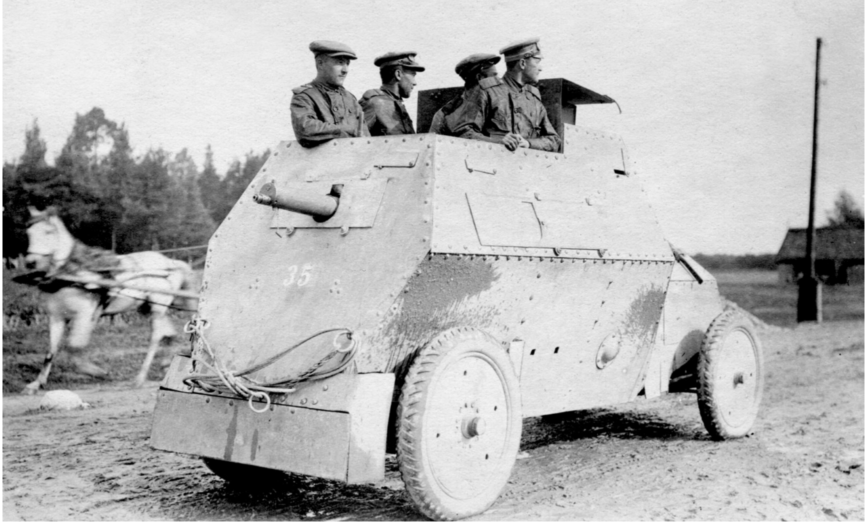


A Russian infantry section shares a meal in the traditional manner from one pot. The wooden spoons were traditionally carried in the soldier's boot. (Courtesy of Stephen Perry)

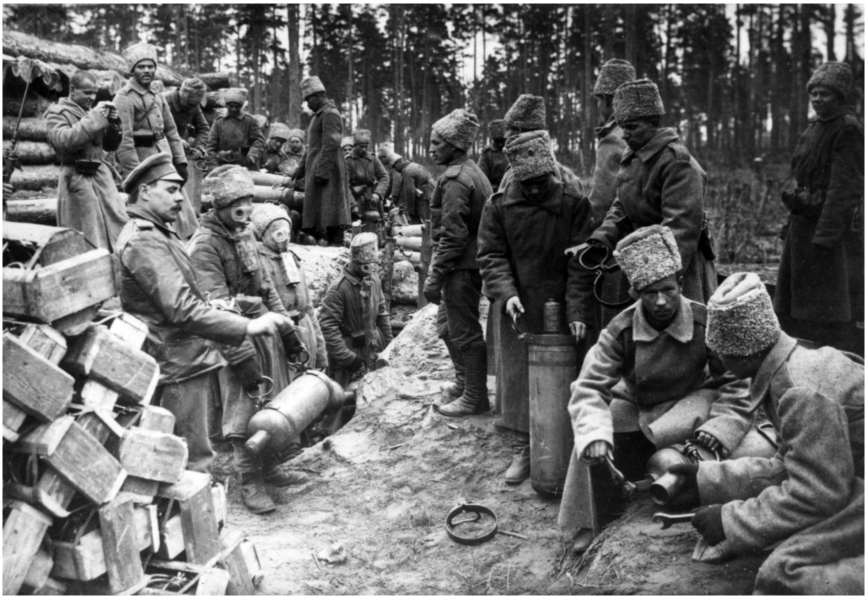


Pre-war training image of Russian infantry going into the attack. Movement with fire support, as seen here, was more common in the Russian Army than its opponents. (Nik Cornish at www.Stavka.org.uk)

Russian infantry training in the field. Brusilov was an adherent of this more practical form of preparation for the men. (Nik Cornish at www.Stavka.org.uk)

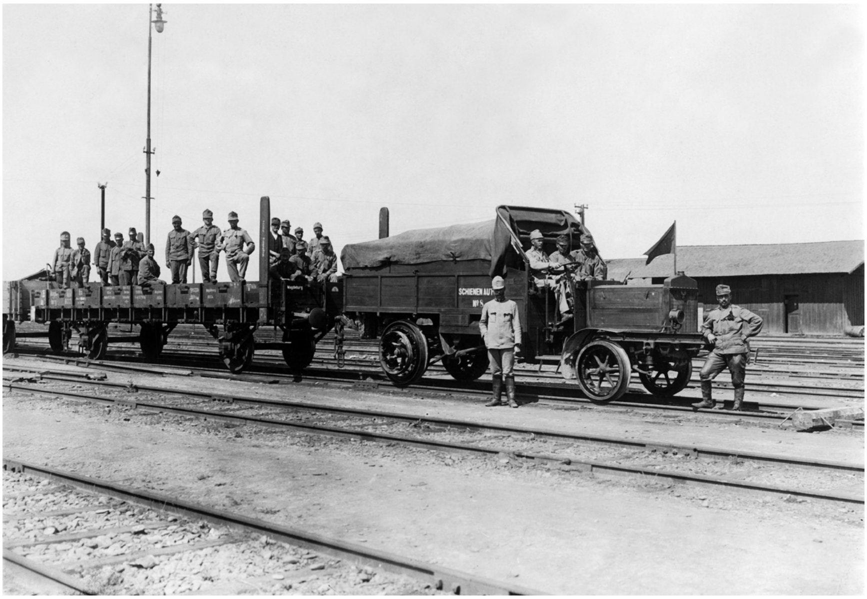


One of several Russo-Balt armoured cars that formed part of the 1st Automobile Machine-gun Company that was formed on 10 August 1914. Russia deployed increasing numbers of armoured cars as the war dragged on, the bulk of which were imported from the British Austin company. (Courtesy of Stephen Perry)



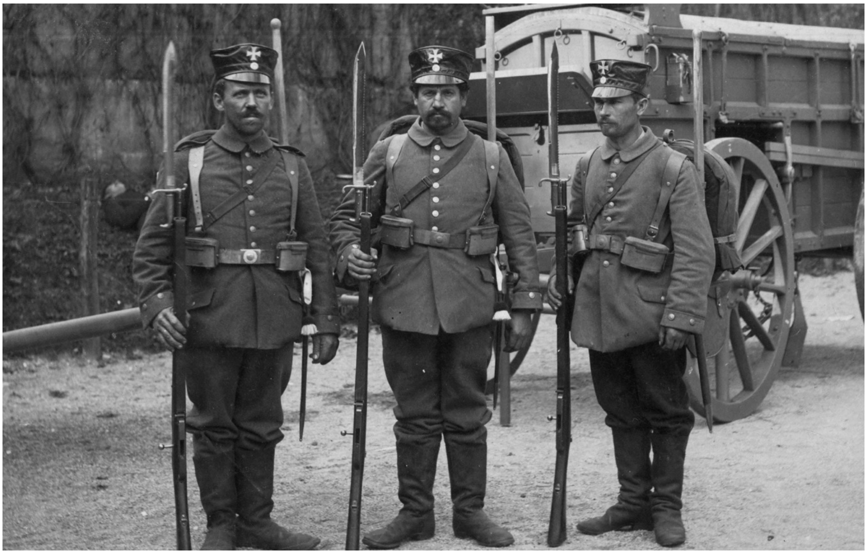
The Russians used gas against the Germans and Austrians from 1915 onwards. Under the umbrella of the Chemical Battalion, units were deployed to each of the three fronts. These men are preparing chlorine gas for storage underground. Interestingly very few of them wear masks. (Courtesy of Stephen Perry)

An Austrian dragoon patrol in the snow on the front in Galicia/Volhynia, probably early 1916. (Photo by ullstein bild/ullstein bild via Getty Images)



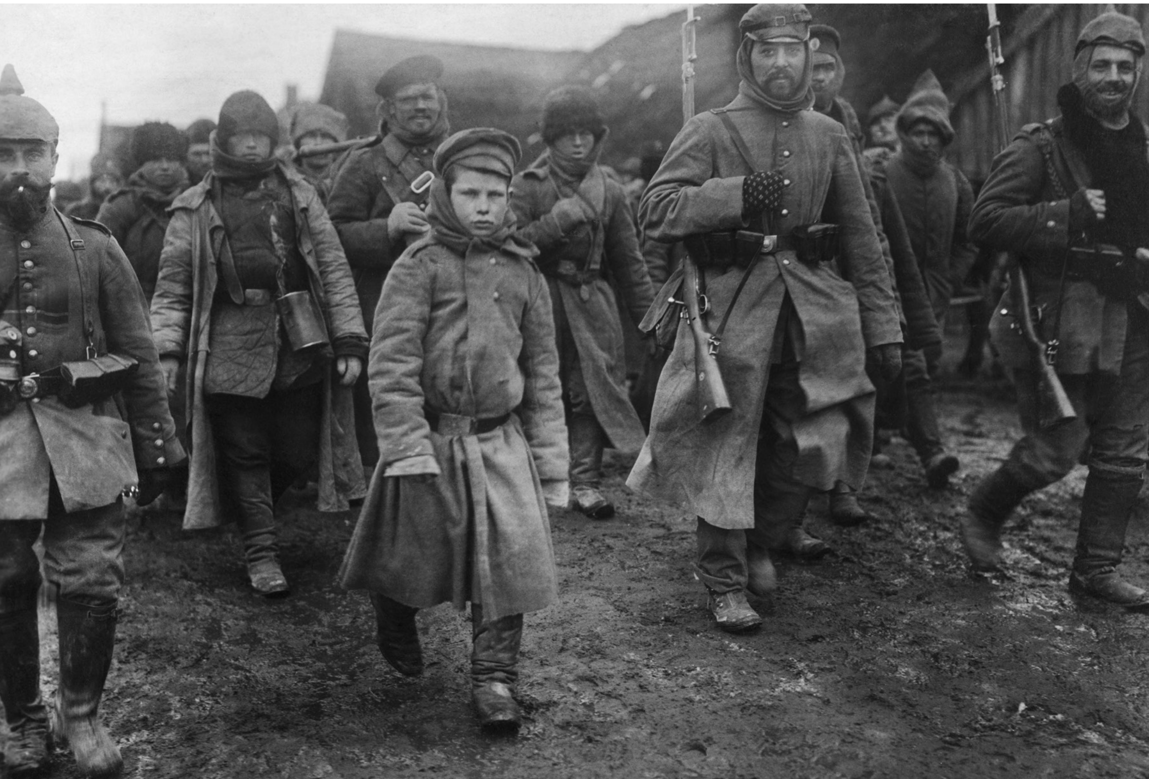
A rail vehicle of the *k.u.k.* Army on a railway station in Galicia, probably in 1915/16. The vehicle could also be used as truck on a road. (©ullsteinbild/TopFoto)

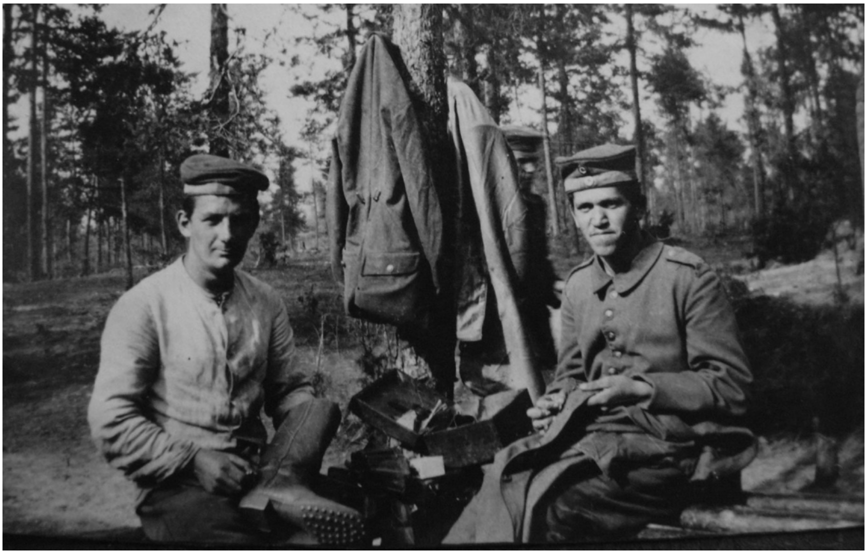
Austro-Hungarian soldiers firing during a training, probably in Galicia, autumn 1916. (©ullsteinbild/TopFoto)



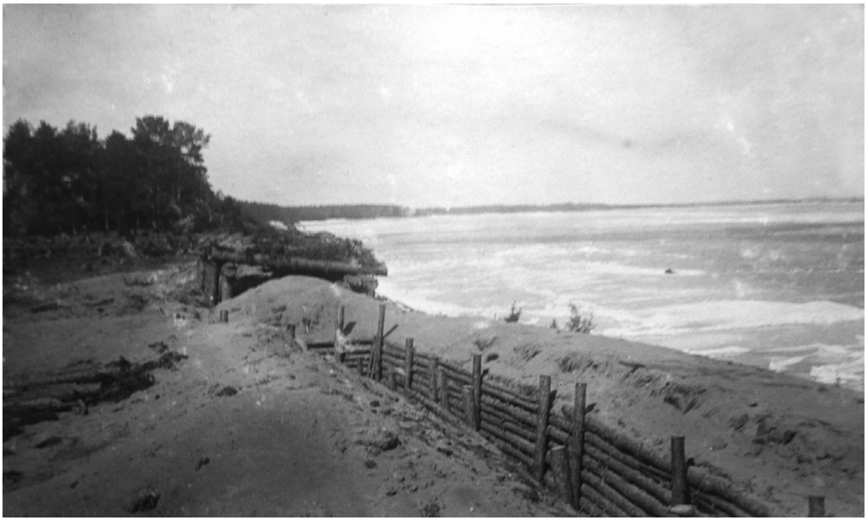
Recruited from men aged 35–55, the Landsturm was deployed in the east from beginning to end of the First World War. Mainly used for escort and occupation duties, they were also employed in the front line when the need arose. Their uniforms and equipment were usually obsolete items. The cross on their caps denotes Landsturm, and dates from the uprising against Napoleon. (Courtesy of Stephen Perry)

Russian prisoners of war being marched into captivity by their German captors on the Eastern Front, about 1916. The prisoners include a 15-year-old boy (centre, left), who claimed he volunteered in order to avoid starvation after his father joined the army and his mother fled their home. (Photo by FPG/Hulton Archive/Getty Images)



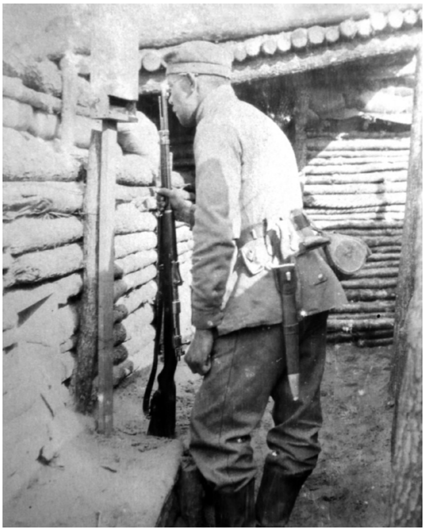


The rigours of living underground and in dirt and mud kept the men very busy repairing their equipment. Soldiers were expected to keep their uniforms and equipment in good working order as they often were not issued new clothes for a year or longer. Metal hobnails were essential, as much to keep leather soles from wearing out as to give traction, but they also conducted into feet the cold that caused many a soldier to lose toes from frostbite. An everyday duty was to examine the seams of clothing where the plague of lice would hide, and every man developed shiny thumbnails and index finger nails from crushing the oily lice they found. (Courtesy of Peter Kolb)

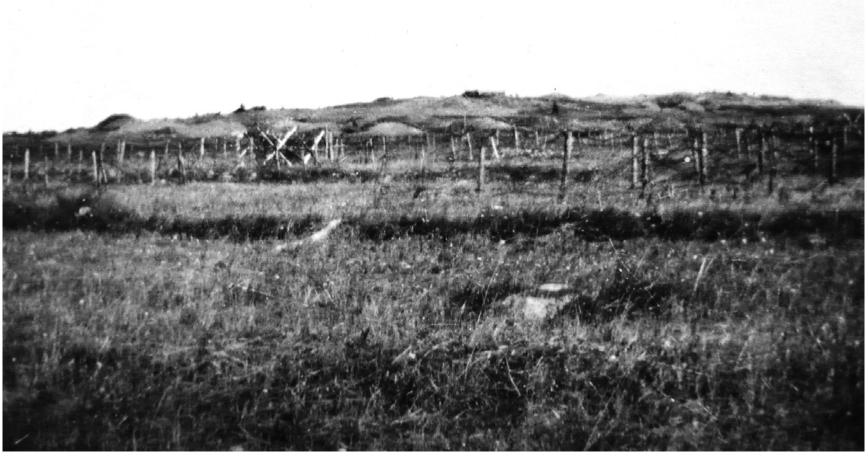


Positions along the shores of Lake Naroch in case of amphibious assault. (Courtesy of Peter Kolb)

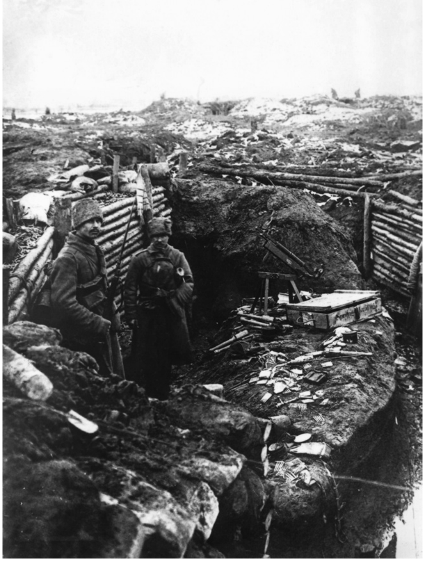
The 24-year-old Leutnant Hans Kondruss was awarded the Iron Cross First Class for ‘bravery and cold blooded refusal to give up when attacked by overwhelming odds’ during the Lake Naroch Offensive by Russian troops. This medal was very rarely awarded to German soldiers of non-noble birth during the First World War. (Courtesy of Peter Kolb)



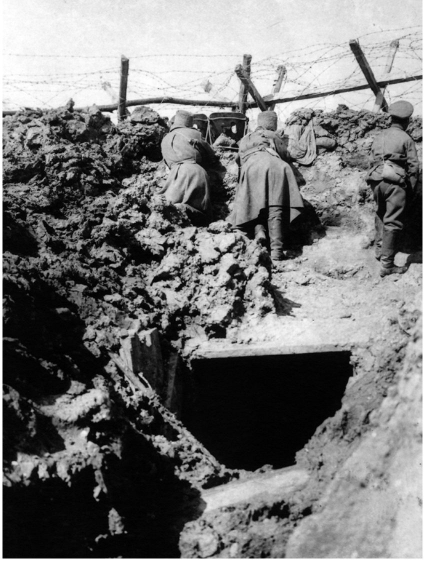
A German sentry observes the front no-man’s land using a prism viewer that kept him safe from sharp shooters and artillery shrapnel. (Courtesy of Peter Kolb)



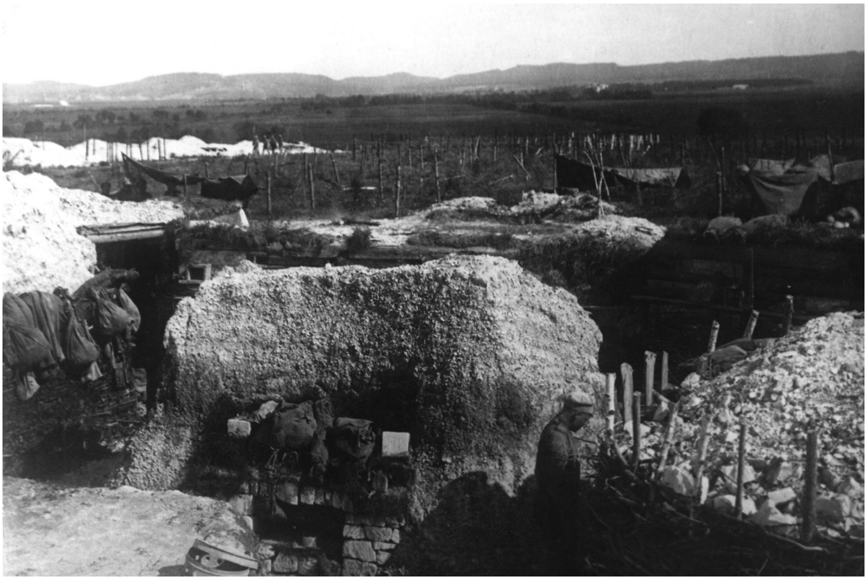
In the swampy flat ground around Lake Naroch this small hill complex became the focal point of a hastily constructed German defence and the objective of Russian infantry charges. Defence of this high point under extreme attacks from Russian troops was credited as the main reason an undermanned German front did not collapse in the last desperate attempts from Russian troops to break through. Its commanding field of fire allowed Leutnant Kondruss and his few hundred troops to defend the entire front between the lakes. (Courtesy of Peter Kolb)



Near the hamlet of Blizniki during the battle of Lake Naroch. Russian troops occupy German trenches. An abandoned bomb thrower (a primitive mortar) can be seen centrally. The shallow depth of the trench shows the local water table. (Courtesy of the Central Museum of the Armed Forces, Moscow via Stavka)



Russian infantry observe the advance during one of the attacks on the first day of the Brusilov Offensive. The tunnel mouth is one of many dug beneath the Austrian wire to reduce casualties during the first attacks. (Courtesy of the Central Museum of the Armed Forces, Moscow via Stavka)



In the distance can be seen the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains, but this position was high-water mark of the Russian offensive during the summer of 1916. (Nik Cornish at www.Stavka.org.uk)

Two wounded men of the 1st Caucasian Rifle Brigade (I Caucasian Corps) await evacuation by *panji* wagon. This is a remarkable image as it shows casualties near to the front line. Russian images tended to be more realistic than those of their western allies. (Courtesy of the Central Museum of the Armed Forces, Moscow via Stavka)

Austro-Hungarian soldiers build defensive positions, probably in the Carpathian plain, Galicia in the autumn of 1916. (©ullsteinbild/TopFoto)

German and Austro-Hungarian baggage train on the mountain pass of Kirlibaba during the Brusilov Offensive. (©ullsteinbild/TopFoto)

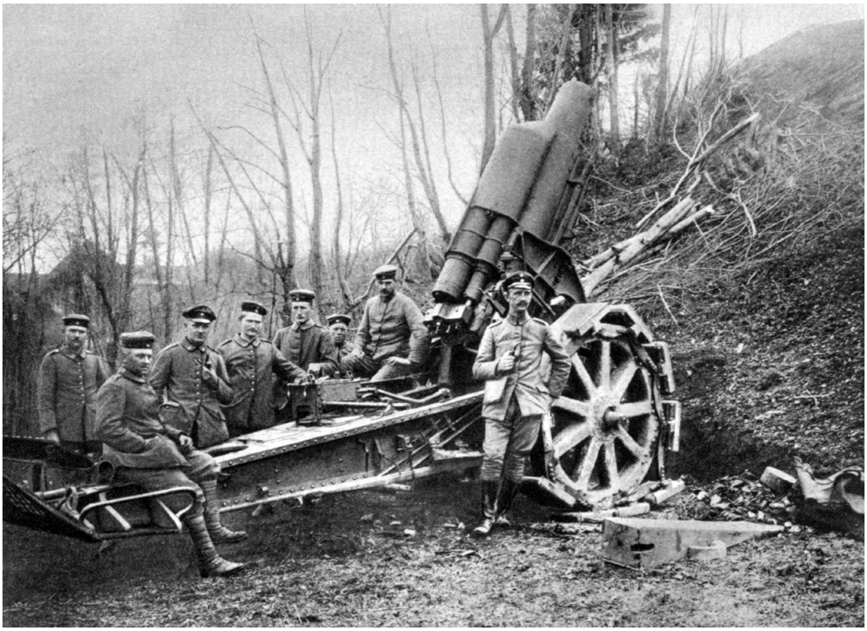
Refugees from the combat zone of the Brusilov Offensive (Volhynia/Podolia) late summer 1916: a weeping peasant who has lost his house and farm. (©ullsteinbild/TopFoto)

A squadron of Hungarian cavalrymen riding in pursuit of fleeing Russians, around 1916. (©ullsteinbild/TopFoto)

German troops in heavy furs during a Russian winter, around 1916. (©ullsteinbild/TopFoto)

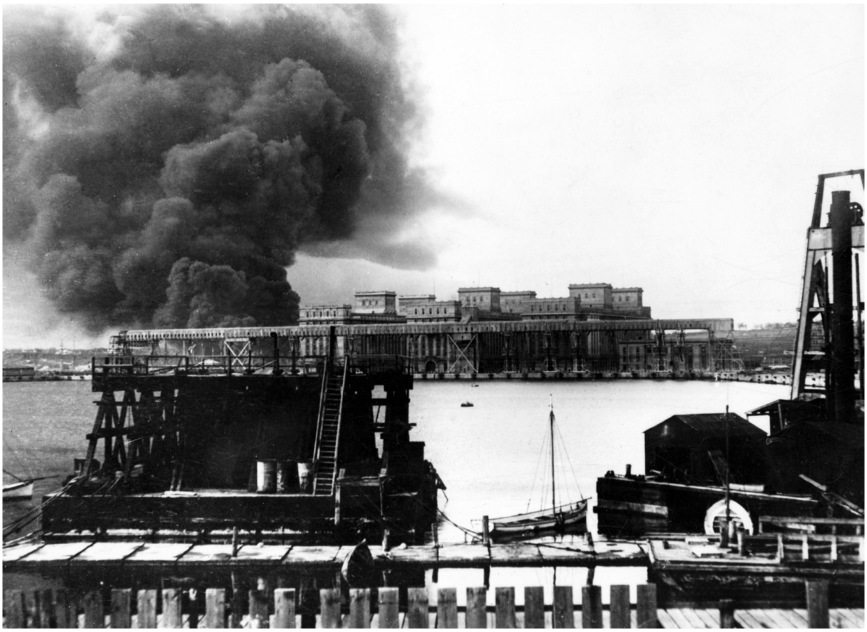
Romanian troops man a gun developed by Alfred Krupp. (Photo by Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

During the resistance outside Bucharest, a hastily-established defensive position. (Photo by Photo12/UIG/Getty Images)

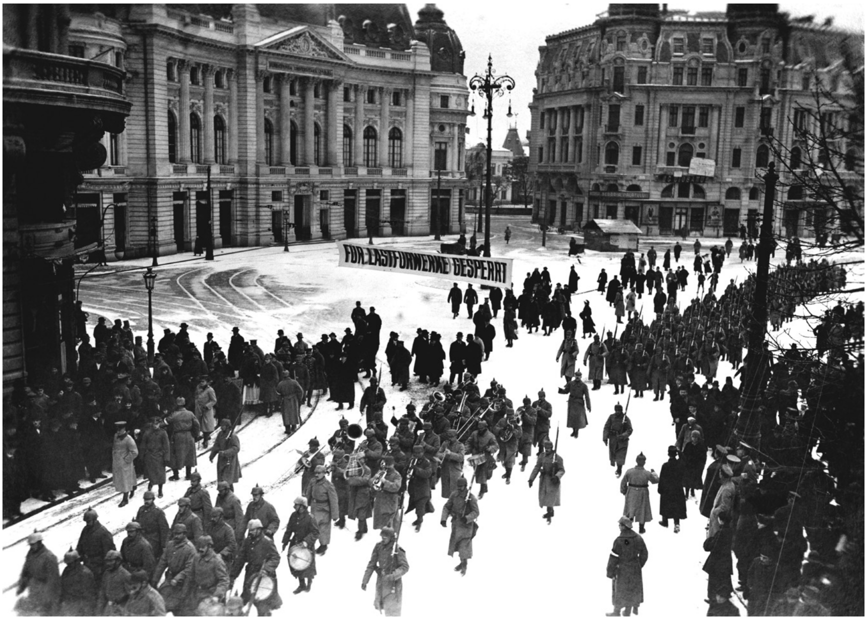


A German mortar at the front, Predeal, Romania, in 1916. Romania entered the war on the allied side in August 1916. Photograph from *Der Grosse Krieg in Bildern*. (Photo by Art Media/Print Collector/Getty Images)

Building of the treadway bridge, November 1916 which enabled the crossing of the Danube River by Mackensen's Danube Army, from the Bulgarian bank near Svistov. (Photo by Robert Sennecke/ullstein bild via Getty Images)



Petrol tanks burning in the harbour of Constanța, evacuated by the Romanians on 22 October 1916 and occupied by Germano-Bulgars, 23 October. Fire burning near huge grain stores. (TopFoto)



Troops of the German Army marching in the streets of Bucharest after its capture, 6 December 1916. (Photo by Mondadori Portfolio via Getty Images)

German troops during the winter fighting of 1916 in Romania. (Nik Cornish at www.Stavka.org.uk)

A skier unit of an Austro-Hungarian infantry regiment has a rest at the turn of the year 1916/17, Carpathian front. (©ullsteinbild/TopFoto)